

Bathing

For the first few days after your baby comes home, bath time can consist of a gentle once-over with a soft, damp wash cloth — warm, of course — and a mild soap. Any basic non-perfumed soap is acceptable such as Dial, or Johnson's. Actually you use much more water than soap in the bath. Too much soap is drying. Regular baths should wait until what's left of the umbilical cord has come off — and, in the case of boys, until the circumcision heals. Once your baby is ready for full-fledged baths, be sure the room is warm, with no drafts, and the water is about 85°. When you stick your elbow in the water, it should feel warmer than your skin but not actually hot. Keep the parts of your baby not being washed covered with a warm towel.

Your baby may find bath time a highlight of his day, if you take a few precautions to keep soap out of his eyes and mouth and make him comfortable. Wash your baby's face with plain water, and a soft cloth. Gently clean your baby's face and scalp when bathing to remove excessive oil and skin debris, working from front to back to keep the soap out of his eyes. Your infant's skin has its own protective oils, so commercial oils, lotions, and powders are not usually necessary. There is no need to wash your baby every day. He is not getting dirty playing in the mud. Every two to three days is sufficient.

Don't try to clean any areas inside his mouth until he starts getting teeth; then you can use a soft cloth and water to clean them.

Eyes

Often mucus collects on the eyelids and lashes. A moist cotton ball is usually sufficient to remove the mucus. If there is pus or if the whites of the eyes or tissues about the eyes are red or swollen, we want to see the baby.

Nose

Sneezing is the baby's way of clearing the mucus, which is often present. If this is not sufficient and the nose remains stuffed, squirt several drops of saltwater nose drops (½ teaspoon of salt in a measuring cup of water) into one nostril. Wait 15-30 seconds, then aspirate with a rubber ear syringe. Repeat in the other nostril. The best time for this procedure is prior to feedings, since a baby depends on easy nose breathing while he sucks.

Ears

With a cotton ball, wipe away any yellow-orange earwax that's collected in the visible part of his ear. Only clean the outside. Do not insert Q-tips into the ear canal. You cannot tell how deep you can go, and more often than not you push the wax farther down or damage the eardrum.

Umbilical Cord

Six times a day, clean the area with rubbing alcohol for several minutes. Use a cotton swab and remove all dried pus or debris. The umbilical area does not have any sensation, so the alcohol won't sting. If the cord is still present, clean underneath it by lifting it up. If the cord has fallen off, pour some alcohol into the depression and remove it after 2 or 3 minutes. It takes that long to kill bacteria. Air exposure and dryness help healing, so be sure to keep the diaper folded down below the cord area.