

Your New Baby

As a new parent, you may have questions about your baby. Below are some common physical features and behaviors you may notice in your baby soon after birth.

Sleep and Wake Cycles

For the first few hours after birth, babies are active and awake. Then they become sleepy for the next 12 to 24 hours. Expect your baby to sleep 16 to 20 hours a day, and not on any set schedule. Babies wake often at night for feedings.

Head

Your baby's head may look large and misshaped from the birth process. This will slowly correct itself in about a week. Babies have two soft spots on the head. These soft spots will slowly close and do not need any special care.

Eyes

Babies see best at a distance of 8 to 10 inches. Your baby's eye color changes to its permanent color at 6 to 12 months. It is normal for your baby's eyes to be swollen, have red spots in the white part of the eyes or look cross-eyed. These conditions will most often go away.

Breasts and Genitals

It is normal for babies' breasts and genitals to look swollen. This will slowly go away. The baby's breasts may have a small amount of milk-like fluid coming out of them that will slowly go away. It is normal for baby girls to have a small amount of blood-tinged vaginal discharge and mucus for several days after birth.

Skin

The lips and the area inside the mouth should be pink.

- If you notice any blueness around your baby's mouth and your baby is not alert or able to respond to you, call 911.
- If your baby develops skin blisters filled with fluid or pus, call your baby's doctor to have your baby checked for an infection, especially if there is also a cough, fever or poor feeding.

These skin conditions may be seen and will often go away without treatment:

- Patches of red skin seen on the eyelids, forehead or back of the neck.
- Bluish-gray spots found on the back and buttocks that often fade over a period of months or years.

- Fine, white bumps that are not blisters over a red background. This does not need any creams or lotions.
- Tiny white dots that appear on the face. Do not squeeze them.
- Dry peeling skin or cracking around the wrists or ankles. As the dry skin flakes off, new soft skin will appear.
- Fine, downy hair seen on the back, arms and ears.
- Creamy, white substance that may be on the skin at birth and stay in skin folds for the first few days after birth.

Jaundice

Jaundice is a yellow color of the skin and eyes. It often goes away in 1 to 2 weeks. In the hospital, a small sample of your baby's blood may be tested to check the amount of jaundice. After you go home, check your baby's skin and eye color in natural daylight or in a room with fluorescent lights.

Call your baby's doctor if:

- Your baby's abdomen, legs and arms are yellow.
- Your baby's whites of the eyes are yellow.
- Your baby is yellow and your baby is hard to wake, is fussy or not feeding.

Coughing, Sneezing, and Hiccups

Coughing and sneezing at times is normal. It does not mean the baby is ill unless there is a yellowish or greenish discharge from the nose or other symptoms. New babies often hiccup during or after eating.

Choking

Babies can choke when held too flat when eating. When feeding, hold your baby's head upright and never prop a bottle. If your baby chokes, coughs or spits up, stop the feeding, sit him up or hold him over on his side. Pat his back gently until the choking stops then start the feeding again. New parents should take an infant CPR class.

Senses

Babies are always growing and learning about the world around them. Babies like being held, rocked, stroked and carried. A sturdy but gentle touch can help them feel secure and calm. Babies love to hear you talk to them and will listen to your voice and other sounds. Babies have a good sense of smell. They can smell breast milk or formula. Babies can follow slow moving objects and can focus on things up to eight inches away.

Reflexes

Several reflexes are present at birth.

- There is a **startle reflex** where the baby's arms will flare out and their legs will straighten when they hear a loud noise or are suddenly moved.
- The **sucking reflex** should be strong and vigorous
- The **rooting reflex** is when the baby turns his head toward the breast or nipple and may also open his mouth.
- The **stepping reflex** is when the baby makes a stepping movement when held in a standing position.
- The **grasping reflex** is when the baby will hold on tightly to an object placed in the baby's palm.

Talk to your baby's doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.