Recent research suggests that it is safer to bath your baby in plain water for at least the first four weeks of life. At birth, the top layer of your baby’s skin is very thin and absorbent. This means it is more sensitive to damage from germs, chemicals and water loss. During the first 4 weeks (longer in premature infants) your baby’s skin matures and develops its own natural protective barrier. If your newborn baby has skin problems, for example milk spots, dry patches, or redness, you may need to be patient: these can take up to 12 weeks to clear. Remember that anything placed on, in or around your baby has the potential to harm. By following the advice in this leaflet, you will give your baby the best possible start in life.

Cord care for the healthy term baby

Keep the area around the cord clean and dry. After the first bath in plain water, pat this dry with a clean towel. Fold the nappy back at each change until the cord falls off. In the first few days, you should only top’n’tail your baby to allow the cord to separate naturally. Only use wet cotton wool to clean the area if it is dirty - otherwise leave it alone. You don’t need to use antiseptic wipes or powders. Some maternity units remove the cord clamp, others don’t. If the cord or surrounding area becomes red or smelly, tell a member of staff.

Cord care for the sick or premature baby

This may be a bit different, as there is a higher risk of infection with these babies. Antiseptic solutions or powders may be used for the first few days, but otherwise cord care should be the same as for other babies. Staff in the neonatal unit will advise you.
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For common sense advice on breastfeeding, check out our acclaimed publication - Breastfeeding: the essential guide

Written by Midwife, Mother and Founder of TIPS Ltd Sharon Trotter

To get information on breastfeeding, baby skincare and related issues, find out about the TIPS Award Scheme, or join the TIPS online community visit www.tipslimited.com
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Baby's first bath will be in plain water. This is to make sure the delicate skin is not damaged while it is vulnerable to germs, chemicals and water loss. Wash cloths should not be used, as they can be harsh (unless they are made from bamboo fibres). Bathing with Baby wipes should not be used.

Premature babies' skin is even more delicate, so it is important to take extra care. Research has shown that massaging premature infants with pure vegetable oils can give some protection against skin infections. Staff in the neonatal unit will be happy to advise you.

If your baby is overdue, their skin will be dry and cracked. This is because the protective vernix has completely absorbed. Don't be tempted to use creams or lotions as this may do more harm than good.

The top layer of your baby's skin will be in a few days of life. This may do more harm than good.

Breastfeeding, skin-to-skin contact stimulates your baby's heart rate and temperature. Baby massage follows the label very carefully. Do not use products that contain ingredients your baby is sensitive to. Test the product on a small area of skin first. Use it for the first time - even if the product claims to be natural or organic. This is to make sure your baby does not suffer any reaction. When washing your baby's clothes and bedding remember not to use any products that contain sulphates (SLS and SLES).

Baby wipes should not be used for at least the first month. You may like to use a thin layer of baby bath products, simply rinse your baby's hair with water only for at least the first months.

Baby bags are as effective as disposable ones and your baby is not more likely to develop nappy rash if you use these.

Always wash your baby's carefully before use. This is to try using wipes that do not contain alcohol, parabens, phthalates, artificial colours or perfumes.

It is safer to file nails with a soft nail file than to use scissors - these can leave sharp edges. Baby nails need to have started to come away can be peeled off gently.

You don't need to wash baby's hair with shampoo until they are a year old. Once you have started to use baby bath products, simply rinse your baby's hair in the bath. Check that any shampoo you use does not contain sulphates (SLS and SLES).

Baby should sleep in your room, on a firm mattress but not on a water bed or bean bag.

Don't let your baby get too hot - the ideal room temperature is between 16 and 20°C.

Remember not to use any products on broken skin.

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toddler skin becomes sticky, ask a member of staff in the neonatal unit to use barrier cream on the nappy area.

You may like to use a thin layer of barrier cream on the nappy area. This will help reduce the risk of bacterial infection from your hands to the product and ensure that the nappy balm is effective for longer.

If after a few weeks you decide to use baby skincare products read the label very carefully. Do not use products that contain ingredients your baby is sensitive to. Test the product on a small area of skin for at least 24 hours (use it for the first time - even if the product claims to be natural or organic. This is to make sure your baby does not suffer any reaction.

When washing your baby's clothes and bedding remember not to use any detergents that contain essential oils. If possible, ask a qualified midwife, doctor or dietician if the product is suitable. If you have allergies developing.

Breastfeeding is best for your baby. It strengthens their immune system, giving some protection against allergies developing.

Moving onto solids - whether you breastfeed or bottle-feed, weaning should be 'baby-led'. This means that you should let your baby feed themselves from the very start of weaning. You can find out more about this online: go to www.viam.org.uk.

From the age of six months your baby should start to drink from cups without teats or spouts - these are often called 'open top' cups. Babies over one year old should not drink from bottles.

Baby wipes should not be used for the first month. This is to use wipes that do not contain alcohol, parabens, phthalates, artificial colours or perfumes.

Always wash your hands carefully before and after changing your baby's nappy. This will help reduce the risk of bacteria getting from your fingers to the product and ensure that the nappy balm is effective for longer.

Never share a bed with your baby or your partner:

- are smokers (no matter where you smoke)

- have been drinking alcohol
- take medication or drugs that make you drowsy, or

- feel very tired.

Using dummies - what you need to know

Claims that dummies reduce the risk of cot death are not based on strong evidence. Brian Palmer DDS, internationally recognised researcher, has done extensive research on the possible increased risk of cot death linked to bottle feeding and the use of dummies. For more information visit Brian Palmer's website (www.brianpalmermd.com).

Remember that, if used, dummies may permanently change the shape of a baby's mouth and jaw affecting its correct development. This may lead to breathing difficulties or when you smoke)

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