Washing and bathing your baby

You don't need to bathe your baby every day. You may prefer to wash their face, neck, hands and bottom instead. This is often called "topping and tailing".

Choose a time when your baby is awake and content. Make sure the room is warm. Get everything ready beforehand. You'll need a bowl of warm water, a towel, cotton wool, a fresh nappy and, if necessary, clean clothes.

**Topping and tailing tips**

* Hold your baby on your knee or lay them on a changing mat. Take off all their clothes, apart from their vest and nappy, and wrap them in a towel.
* Dip the cotton wool in the water (make sure it doesn't get too wet) and wipe gently around your baby's eyes from the nose outward, using a fresh piece of cotton wool for each eye. This is so that you don't transfer any stickiness or infection from one eye to another.
* Use a fresh piece of cotton wool to clean around your baby's ears, but not inside them. Never use cotton buds to clean inside your baby's ears. Wash the rest of your baby's face, neck and hands with cotton wool in the same way and dry them gently with the towel.
* Take off the nappy and wash your baby's bottom and genital area with fresh cotton wool and warm water. Dry very carefully, including between the skin folds, and put on a clean nappy.
* You only need to wash around your baby's umbilical cord if it's dirty with pee or poo. Clean the area with fresh cotton wool and warm water, and gently pat dry with a towel.
* It will help your baby to relax if you keep talking while you wash them. The more they hear your voice, the more they'll get used to listening to you and start to understand what you're saying.

Bathing your baby safely

Never leave your baby alone in the bath, even for a second.

Do not allow older children to look after your baby in the bath. Babies of any age should always be supervised by adults while in the bath.

You don't need to bathe your baby every day, but if they really enjoy it, there's no reason why you shouldn't.

It's best not to bathe your baby straight after a feed or when they're hungry or tired. Make sure the room you're bathing them in is warm.

Have everything you need at hand: a baby bath or clean washing-up bowl filled with warm water, 2 towels, a clean nappy, clean clothes and cotton wool.

* The water should be warm, not hot. Run the cold water first and then add hot water. Check it with your wrist or elbow and mix it well so there are no hot patches.
* You can use just water, or add a liquid cleanser that's suitable for babies.
* Hold your baby on your knee and clean their face.
* Next, wash their hair with plain water, supporting them over the bowl.
* Once you've dried their hair gently, you can take off their nappy, wiping away any mess.
* Lower your baby gently into the bowl or bath using one hand to hold their upper arm and support their head and shoulders. Then use the other hand to gently swish the water over your baby without splashing.
* Keep your baby's head clear of the water.
* Lift your baby out and pat them dry, paying special attention to the creases in their skin.
* Empty the bath water as soon as you've finished using it.
* This is a good time to massage your baby. Massage can help them relax and sleep. If you want to use any oils or lotions, check they're suitable for babies.
* Cover your baby or put their clothes on once they're dry, to keep them warm.
* If your baby seems frightened of bathing and cries, try bathing together. Make sure the water isn't too hot. It's easier if someone else holds your baby while you get in and out of the bath.

Baby bath seats

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) recommends that baby bath seats are not used.

Bath seats can come away from the bath, and babies of any age can drown very quickly in just a few centimetres of water, with no noise or struggle.

It's not safe to leave them unsupervised in a baby bath seat, even for a few seconds.

Cutting your baby's nails

Some babies are born with long nails and it's important to cut them in case they scratch themselves.

You can buy special baby nail clippers or small, round-ended safety scissors. These are safer to use than adult nail clippers or scissors. Or you could try filing them down with a fine emery board instead.

It's best to cut your baby's nails when they're asleep or relaxed, so that they're not moving too much.