

# Lincoln Pediatrics

## *Adam Sergiwa, M.D.*

### **Newborn Skin Care (Normal)**

#### **Bathing**

You may bathe your baby daily, but for the first few months, 2 or 3 times a week is often enough for a full bath. Clean your baby's drools and spills as they happen and keep the face, hands and diaper area clean.

Keep the bath water level below the naval or give sponge baths until a few days after the navel cord has fallen off. Submerging the cord could cause infection or interfere with its drying out and falling off. Getting the cord a little wet doesn't matter.

Use tap water without any soap or with a nondrying baby soap. Don't forget to wash the face and neck; otherwise, chemicals from dribbled milk and food can build up and cause an irritated rash. Also rinse off the eyelids with water.

Don't forget to wash the genital area. However, when you wash the inside of the female genital area (the vulva), never use soap. Rinse the area with plain water and wipe from front to back to prevent irritation. This practice and the avoidance of any bubble baths before puberty may prevent many urinary tract infections and vaginal irritations. At the end of the bath, rinse your baby well; soap residue can be irritating.

#### **Changing Diapers**

After you remove a wet diaper, just rinse your baby's bottom off with a wet washcloth or diaper wipe. After soiled diapers, rinse the bottom under running warm water or in a basin of warm water. You can't clean BMs off the skin with diaper wipes alone. Millions of bacteria will remain and cause diaper rashes. After you clean the rear, cleanse the genital area by wiping front to back with a wet cloth. In boys, stool can hide under the scrotum, so rinse carefully there. If you have a girl, carefully clean the creases of the vaginal lips (labia).

#### **Shampoo**

Wash your baby's hair once or twice a week with a special baby shampoo that doesn't sting the eyes. Don't be concerned about hurting the anterior fontanelle (soft spot on the head). It is well protected.

#### **Lotions, Ointments, and Powder**

Newborn skin normally does not require any ointments or creams. Especially avoid putting any oil, ointment, or greasy substance on your baby's skin because this will almost always block the small sweat glands and lead to pimples or a heat rash. If the skin starts to become dry and cracked, use a baby lotion, hand lotion, or moisturizing cream twice a day.

Cornstarch powder can be helpful for preventing rashes in areas of friction. Avoid talcum powder because it can cause a serious chemical pneumonia if inhaled into the lungs.

#### **Umbilical Cord**

Try to keep the cord dry. Put rubbing alcohol on the base of the cord (where it attaches to the skin) twice a day (including after the bath) until 1 week after it falls off. Although using alcohol can delay the separation of the cord by 1 or 2 days, it does prevent cord infections, and that's what is most important. Air exposure helps the cord stay dry and eventually fall off, so keep diapers folded down below the cord area. If you are using disposable diapers, you can cut a wedge out of the diaper scissors so the cord is not covered.

#### **Fingernails and Toenails**

Cut the toenails straight across to prevent ingrown toenails. When you cut fingernails, round off the corners of the nails so your baby doesn't scratch himself or others.

Trim the nails once a week after a bath, when the nails are softened by the bath. Use clippers or special baby scissors. This job usually takes two people unless you do it while your child is asleep.

## Newborn Skin Care (Normal)

### Page 2

*Women's Health Advisor 2006.4; Copyright © 2006 McKesson Corporation and/or one of its subsidiaries. All Rights Reserved.  
Written by B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of "Your Child's Health," Bantam Books. This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.*