



RAINBOW PEDIATRICS

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CARING FOR YOU BABY'S SKIN

Parents frequently ask how to care for their newborn's delicate skin. These guidelines will help you to provide daily care and deal with common problems.

Keep it clean

You don't need a closet full of special "baby" products to keep your baby skin clean and healthy. Simple washing with gentle soap (Dove, Neutrogena, Purpose, Caress) and water is usually best. You don't need baby oil at all, and the only place you may want to use powder is in the diaper area, sparingly. Don't shake out great clouds of talcum powder; breathing in talc particles can be harmful. There is no reason to use special diaper wipes for routine care, although they are helpful when traveling.

Most babies do not need lotions to lubricate the skin. However, if your baby has a tendency toward dry skin or has atopic dermatitis (eczema), you can alleviate the problem by:

- using mild soap
- cutting down on baths (perhaps two or three a week, using a gentle cleansing and moisturizing agent such as Celaphil lotion instead of soap and water, with sponge baths in between), and
- using a moisturizing cream or lotion, such as Lubriderm, Nutraderm, Moisturel, DML, or Eucerin.

Fragrances may not be a problem for most infants. However, when skin eruptions are persistent, the use of fragrance-free soaps or lotions may be helpful.

When there's a problem

Most of the blemishes you see from time to time on your baby's skin are minor nuisances. Babies break out with a variety of conditions that look like whiteheads and acne; these will almost always go away without treatment. Let us know if they persist or you are concerned.

Prickly heat is common in newborns. It occurs when young babies retain sweat. The best treatment is to reduce sweating by avoiding excessive heat and humidity, dressing your baby lightly, and using cool baths and air conditioning.

Two conditions that are persistent and may disturb you and the baby are cradle cap and diaper rash. Cradle cap, or seborrheic dermatitis, appears as greasy crust, usually on the scalp but sometimes on the face, ears, trunk, diaper area, or in folds where the skin rubs together. Although it usually does not itch, it can be unsightly. The best way to treat cradle-cap is with an appropriate antidandruff shampoo. Cradle cap will almost always clear up on its own, usually by 1 year of age. Check with us if the condition persists or is hard to control.

Diaper rash, on the other hand, may be a problem for as long as the child is in diapers. This red, irritated condition is caused primarily by prolonged wetness and exposure to irritants in the baby's urine and bowel movements. The situation is often made worse by the use of waterproof diaper coverings. Diaper rash leaves the skin particularly vulnerable to infections.

The best cure is prevention. Keep the diaper area as dry as possible by changing diapers frequently, at night as well as in the daytime. Clean the area with mild soap and water, and pat dry with a soft cloth. Use cornstarch or medicated powders such as Caldesene or ZeaSorb to help keep the area dry and reduce friction. Let your baby go without a diaper when you can, to expose the area to the air; the least messy way to do this is to put the baby down on the abdomen, on top of several diapers or absorbent pads. If diaper rash appears to be a problem, the use of gel-absorbent disposable diapers or plain diapers with rubber or plastic coverings is helpful.

Call us if these measures do not control the problem, or if the rash is severe enough to cause you concern.

A word about the sun

The last thing you or your baby needs is a tan or sunburn. Exposure to the sun's rays is damaging, and the effects add up over time. You should be aware that vulnerability to skin cancer begins in infancy. The best way to protect young infants is

simply to keep them out of the sun. Keep the sunshade up on the stroller, find a shady place to enjoy the outdoors, and dress the baby protectively. Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or more whenever he or she is outdoors. Protecting children from the sun is worth the effort. Studies show that using a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or greater during the first 18 year decreases the lifetime incidence of skin cancer and sun damage by as much as 78%