

Advice on skincare for newborn babies

This leaflet is to provide general and practical advice on caring for your newborn baby's skin. If you have any questions or concerns about your baby's skin, please speak to your midwife, health visitor or GP.

Faced with a huge range of baby cleansing and skincare products, parents are often confused about what to use and when. Research now indicates that 'less is most definitely more' and it is better to avoid the use of skin cleansing and moisturising products for the first few weeks until your baby's skin has had time to mature naturally.

1. Following birth, vernix should be left on the skin to absorb naturally. Vernix is the creamy white coating that covers the newborn baby.
2. A baby comb can be used to remove debris, such as skin flakes, from baby's hair. This is in place of using shampoo for the first few weeks.
3. It is not a good idea to clean baby's eyes unless the midwife, health visitor or doctor tells you otherwise. If the eyes are sticky, it is best to gently wipe with cotton wool dampened with sterile or cooled, boiled water –starting from the inside of the eye and wiping to the outer edge of the eye using a clean cotton wool ball for each wipe.
4. If baby's skin is dry or cracked, avoid creams or lotions if possible as they may cause further problems. Please seek advice from your midwife or health visitor. Early skin exposure (before 2-4 weeks) to some products may result in allergic reactions or eczema so we recommend using plain water for cleansing your baby, i.e. no soap or baby bath. After a few weeks, the skin will have developed its naturally protective barrier so (if needed) you can then introduce an emollient based cream on any dry skin, which will not dry out the skin but will give some protection. Any product introduced should be used sparingly and should be free from alcohol, colour and perfume. Your health visitor or chemist can advise on products.
5. We advise that you avoid using baby wipes until your baby is at least 2-4 weeks old. When used, they should be mild and free from alcohol and perfume.
6. We recommend that for premature babies, skin products are avoided for 6-8 weeks as the skin's protective barrier takes longer to mature.
7. Nappy rash can occur due to prolonged exposure to urine or faeces. Care of the nappy area should include cleansing with water and should be dried by exposing to air or gentle patting whenever the nappy is soiled and the use of good quality super-absorbent nappies. A small amount of emollient based cream can be used as prevention or treatment of nappy rash. If your baby does experience nappy rash, use zinc based cream to treat it.

References

1. Atherton D, Mills K. (2004). What can be done to keep babies' skin healthy? RCM Midwives Journal 7(7): 288-290.
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4. Trotter S (2002) Skincare for the newborn: exploring the potential harm of manufactured products. RCM Midwives Journal 5(11): 376-8.
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