

# TIPS FOR BATHING AND DIAPERING INFANTS

- Immersion bathing does NOT need to wait until after the umbilical cord stump falls off. Research shows no differences in healing time or complications.
- Use of a mild liquid baby soap has similar effects on skin parameters vs. using water alone. In fact, soap cleans better than water, may result in less rubbing to remove debris, and may help to maintain the skin's pH better than water alone. However, preterm infants less than 32 weeks gestation, should be bathed using warm water ONLY during the first week of life.
- Bathing significantly influences thermoregulation during the early neonatal period, especially for those infants born less than 37 weeks. The bath water should be between 100 – 104 F; the room temperature between 79 – 81 F; and the newborns temperature and cardiorespiratory status should be stable (for full term babies, the babies' temperature should be at least 98.2 and the bath should be delayed for at least one hour after birth. Sponge bathing may cause an increase in heat loss vs. immersion bathing. This has implications for mother baby nurses who are moving away from a central nursery model and conducting the first bath in the mom's room. Controlling the room environment, using prewarmed towels, and changing the infants clothes 10 minutes after the bath can also help prevent heat loss.
- Infants who were bathed in a tub showed a reduction in crying vs. sponge bathing. Additionally, swaddled bathing has been shown to prevent uncontrolled motor activity in the newborn as well as decrease parental stress.
- Do not attempt to remove residual vernix during the bath, as it protects the skin. Vernix should be allowed to wear off with normal care.
- Mild, liquid bath soaps have been validated as safe to use. Avoid getting the product in the baby's eyes, as the blink reflex is delayed until 4 months of age. Use a pH neutral or slightly acidic product. Additionally use products with preservatives that have demonstrated safety and tolerability in newborns. The Environmental Working Group's skin deep data base rates more than 2000 baby care products for toxicity and tolerability.
- Diapers should be changed every 1-3 hours. Appropriate methods to clean the diaper area include disposable diaper wipes, soft cloths and water, or soft clothes/water/liquid cleanser. Alcohol free diaper wipes are preferred. Additionally, water along may be insufficient in removing feces and may cause more dryness vs. water and a cleanser.
- Zinc Oxide based products work well as a barrier product in treating diaper rash. But emphasis is placed on applying it thickly – like frosting on a cake. Petroleum products can also be used for mild diaper rash or as a preventive during times when there is an increased risk for developing diaper dermatitis.

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AWHONN's Neonatal Skin Care Guidelines, 3rd edition.  
<http://www.awhonn.org/awhonn/index.do>

