



First Weeks at Home with a Newborn

Preventing Fatigue and Exhaustion

For many mothers the first weeks at home with a new baby are often the hardest in their lives. You will probably feel overworked, even overwhelmed. Inadequate sleep will leave you fatigued. Caring for a baby can be a lonely and stressful responsibility. You may wonder if you will ever catch up on your rest or work. The solution is asking for help.

Every baby awakens one or more times a night. The way to avoid sleep deprivation is to know the total amount of sleep you need per day and to get that sleep in bits and pieces. Go to bed earlier in the evening after your baby's final feeding of the day. When your baby naps you must also nap. Your baby doesn't need you hovering while he or she sleeps. If sick, your baby will show symptoms. While you are napping take the telephone off the hook and put up a sign on the door saying MOTHER AND BABY SLEEPING. If your total sleep remains inadequate, hire a baby sitter or bring in a relative. If you don't take care of yourself, you won't be able to take care of your baby.

The Postpartum Blues

More than 50% of women experience postpartum blues on the third or fourth day after delivery. The symptoms include tearfulness, tiredness, sadness, and difficulty in thinking clearly. The main cause of this temporary reaction is probably the sudden decrease of maternal hormones. These symptoms usually clear in 1 to 3 weeks as the hormone levels return to normal.

Helpers: Relatives, Friends, Sitters

As already emphasized, everyone needs extra help during the first few weeks alone with a new baby. Clarify that your role is looking after your baby. Your helper's role is to shop, cook, houseclean, and wash clothes and dishes.

The Father's Role

The age of noninvolvement of the father is over. Not only does the mother need the father to help her with household chores, but the baby also needs to develop a close relationship with the father.

Visitors

Only close friends and relatives should visit you during your first month at home. They should not visit if they are sick.

Feeding Your Baby: Achieving Weight Gain

Your main All babies lose a few ounces during the first few days after birth. Most bottle-fed babies are back to birth weight by 10 days of age, and breast-fed babies by 14 days of age.

A breast-feeding mother often wonders if her baby is getting enough calories. Your baby is doing fine if he or she demands to nurse every 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 hours, appears satisfied after feedings, takes both breasts at each nursing, wets 6 or more diapers each day, and passes 3 or more soft stools per day.

Dealing with Crying

Crying babies need to be held. They need a soothing voice and touch. You can't spoil a baby during the early months.

Sleep Position

Place your baby to sleep on his BACK as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics. This reduces the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Taking Your Baby Outdoors

You can take your baby outdoors at any age. Dress the baby with as many layers of clothing as an adult would wear for the outdoor temperature. A common mistake is overdressing a baby in summer. In winter, a baby needs a hat because he or she often doesn't have much hair to protect against heat loss. Cold air or winds do not cause ear infections or pneumonia.

The skin of babies is more sensitive to the sun than the skin of older children. Keep sun exposure to small amounts (10 to 15 minutes at a time). Protect your baby's skin from sunburn with longer clothing and a bonnet.

Medical Checkup on the Third or Fourth Day of Life

Early discharge from the newborn nursery has become commonplace for full-term babies. Early discharge means going home within 24 to 48 hours after giving birth. In general this is a safe practice if the baby's hospital stay has been uncomplicated. These newborns need to be re-checked 2 days after discharge to see how well they are feeding, urinating, producing stools, maintaining weight, and breathing. They will also be checked for jaundice and overall health.

The Two-Week Medical Checkup

This checkup is probably the most important medical visit for your baby during the first year of life. By two weeks of age your baby will usually have developed symptoms of any physical condition that was not detectable during the hospital stay. Your child's health care provider will be able to judge how well your baby is growing from his or her height, weight, and head circumference.

If at all possible, both the mother and father should go to these visits. Most physicians prefer to get to know both parents during a checkup rather than during the crisis of an acute illness.