

A Complete Guide to Bathing Your Newborn



Highlights

Generally, a bath 2 to 3 times per week is enough to keep your newborn baby's skin clean.

If they like to be bathed, it's fine to bath them more frequently.

Make sure you support your baby's head and keep their face clear of the water.

Sometimes baths can dry your baby's skin, so only use a small amount of soap or baby bath wash.

In This Article

Bath Time Basics

Choosing the Right Tub

Safe Suds and Gentle Washes

Helpful Bath Accessories

Picking the Perfect Moment

Step-by-Step Bathing Guide

Quick Clean Option: Topping and Tailing

How Often Is Too Often?

Bath Safety Essentials

Adapting to a Growing Baby

Sitting Strong: Washing a Seated Baby Tools And Assistance

Bath Time Basics

It's helpful to have:

Somewhere to bath your baby that is stable and at a comfortable height

At least one large towel and a washer \ (wash cloth\)

A mild cleanser

A clean nappy and clothing

Generally, any baby wash is fine. Many baby washes are also suitable to use as shampoos - just make sure you rinse their scalp well.

Use cleansers sparingly as the skin of newborn babies is often sensitive. If your baby has dry skin, a non-soap, moisturising cleanser is best.

After some practice runs, you'll work out what suits you and your baby best.

Choosing the Right Tub

Babies don't tend to care what they're bathed in, as long as they have room to move around.

Baby baths are ideal because they're portable, easy to empty and easy to clean. But the kitchen sink works just as well in the early weeks of your baby's life.

Safe Suds and Gentle Washes

Most bath products labelled 'for baby' or 'suitable for use on a baby' will be fine to use. Baby bath washes are often soap-free and paraben-free, to reduce the risk of reactions in the eyes and skin.

Soap and bubble bath are more likely to dry and irritate your baby's skin.

Water on its own is not an effective cleanser.

Helpful Bath Accessories

You may want to put a non-slip bath mat on the bottom of the bath. This helps your baby feel secure. A towel on the bottom of the bath is a good alternative.

You may wish to use a bath aid to help support your baby in the bath. This leaves your hands free to wash your baby.

Bath aids are not safety devices. Never leave your child unsupervised in the bathroom.

Picking the Perfect Moment

There is no perfect time to bath your baby. Try to pick a time when you're not rushed.

You may want to give your baby a bath before bedtime as part of their night-time routine.

Step-by-Step Bathing Guide

It helps to be organised before giving your baby a bath. Take time to plan beforehand and be prepared so you can bath your baby safely.

Put warm water in the bath. An ideal temperature is around 37°C to 38°C. You can check the temperature of the bath water with your elbow or wrist. It should feel neutral or slightly warm on your skin. You may also choose to use a bath thermometer.

Try using a shallow amount of water at first. Once you are happy bathing your baby, you can slowly increase the amount of water.

Run cold water through the tap after filling the bath to avoid the risk of burning.

Once the bath is ready, you can follow these steps:

Gently lower your baby into the bath.

Hold your baby securely with one hand, using your free hand to wash your baby's skin.

Wash your baby's head and work down to their toes.

Use plain water on their face, especially around their eyes and mouth.

Use baby wash or soap on their skin and hair, and pay particular attention to their skin folds.

Lift your baby gently out of the bath onto a clean, dry towel.

Gently pat their skin dry and make sure you dry inside their skin creases.

Dress your baby, starting with a clean nappy.

Make bath time a happy event and try not to rush it. Watch for your baby's responses and talk gently to them. Newborns are used to a warm and watery environment and often soothe when they are bathed.

You may want to have another trusted adult with you when you bathe your baby in the early weeks.

Quick Clean Option: Topping and Tailing

If you'd prefer not to bath your baby every day, a quick 'top and tail' clean will do.

Use cotton wool and a bowl of warm water. Wet each piece of cotton wool in warm water. Squeeze it out so it's just damp when you use it. Talk to your baby as you go - tell them what you are doing.

Start by cleaning your baby's face and eyes. Wipe each eye from the inner corner out. Use a separate piece of cotton wool for each eye. Then use another piece to wipe around their mouth and nose.

Use another piece of cotton wool to clean your baby's ears, neck, and face. Pay attention to their neck creases.

You may want to add a liquid cleanser to the water before washing their hands and feet.

Take off your baby's nappy and gently wash their bottom. This is the tailing.

Make sure you dry them carefully - in particular their skin folds.

How Often Is Too Often?

It's not necessary to bath your baby every day - around 2 to 3 times a week will be enough. Although you may find your baby relaxes when they're in the bath.

You may need to bath your baby more often once they're eating solid food. There's always more mess to clean when babies are learning how to feed themselves.

Bath Safety Essentials

Follow these steps to help keep your baby safe in the bath:

Get everything ready for bath time before you run the water.

Run the bath with warm water. A safe temperature for a child's bath is between 37°C and 38°C (or about 36°C for a newborn).

Check the temperature with your wrist or elbow before placing your baby gently into the bath.

Keep your baby's head and face clear of the water.

Never leave your baby alone in the bath, even for a minute. Babies and children can drown in just a few centimetres of water.

Empty the bath water as soon as you've finished.

Keep the bathroom door shut when the room is not being used.

An adult should always supervise babies and children under 5 years of age when they are in the bath. You should always be within arm's reach of a child in the bath. If you need to leave the bathroom you must take your baby with you.

Ensure that the hot water delivered to your bath is a maximum of 50°C. A plumber can help you set this.

Adapting to a Growing Baby

As your baby gets older, they will learn to look forward to bath time. They will enjoy the opportunity to splash and play with bath toys.

How should I wash my baby now they can control their head?

Between the ages of 3 and 4 months, most babies develop head control. You will still need to help them keep their face and head out of the water.

Hold your baby securely and expect them to move around more than they did when they were a newborn.

Sitting Strong: Washing a Seated Baby

Babies aged between 6 and 9 months may prefer to sit in the bath, rather than lie down.

You may find a baby bath is too small and the big bath is a better option.

They may try to stand up and even climb out of the bath; watch them carefully so they don't slip. You may like to use a protective cover over the taps.

Even once your baby can sit up, it's important that you never leave them alone in the bath.

Tools And Assistance

For a smooth and safe bath time experience, it's helpful to have the following tools and resources on hand:

Bath Time Essentials:

Stable baby bath or sink - A safe, non-slip surface at a comfortable height is key.

Soft towels - At least one large towel to wrap your baby in after the bath.

Washer or washcloth - Gentle material to cleanse delicate skin.

Mild, fragrance-free cleanser - Preferably soap-free and designed for sensitive skin.

Clean clothes and a fresh nappy - Ready to dress your baby right after the bath.

Safety and Comfort Items:

Bath thermometer - Helps ensure the water is at a safe temperature $(37-38^{\circ}\text{C})$.

Non-slip mat - Useful if you're using a full-size bath.

Bath support or bath seat - To help cradle your baby securely while you wash them. Always supervise closely even with aids.

Tap covers - Soft covers that protect babies from bumping or burning themselves.

Where to Get Help:

Helplines or parenting support groups - For advice and reassurance, especially in the early weeks.

Midwife or health visitor - They can provide practical guidance on bathing and skin care.

Child health clinics or parenting classes - Great for demonstrations and tips.

Online video tutorials from trusted health sources - Useful for visual learners.