



HOW TO BATHE A NEWBORN: TIPS FROM DERMATOLOGISTS

ROSEMONT, Ill. (July 9, 2019) — For many parents, bringing home a baby is a happy and exciting time. However, it can also be daunting — especially the thought of bathing this tiny, fragile human. Yet with a little practice, say dermatologists from the American Academy of Dermatology, bathing your baby gets easier and provides a wonderful opportunity to bond with your little one. The key, they say, is to follow a few simple steps to make sure your baby stays safe, clean and healthy during bath time.

“While it may seem intimidating at first, bathing your baby is simple and only needs to happen two to three times a week, as long as the diaper area is thoroughly cleaned during each diaper change,” says board-certified dermatologist Kalyani Marathe, MD, MPH, FAAD. “The first thing to remember is to start off with sponge baths until your baby’s umbilical cord stump falls off and heals.”

To give your newborn a sponge bath, Dr. Marathe recommends the following tips:

1. **Gather the supplies.** You will need a bowl of lukewarm water, a washcloth and a mild, fragrance-free baby soap.
2. **Lay your baby down on a comfortable, flat surface.** Keep your baby warm by wrapping him or her in a towel and only exposing the part of your baby’s body that you are actively washing. For safety, keep one hand on your baby at all times.
3. **Start with your baby’s head.** Dip the washcloth into the bowl of lukewarm water and gently wipe your baby’s face and scalp. It is safe to gently clean over the baby’s soft spots. Don’t forget to clean the creases in the neck and behind the ears.
4. **Clean the rest of the body.** Soap only really needs to be applied to dirty areas; the neck and diaper area are usually sufficient. Add the baby soap into the bowl of water and use the washcloth to gently wash your baby. Make sure to rinse off any soap after cleaning.

“Once your baby’s umbilical cord stump falls off, switch to traditional bathing,” says Dr. Marathe. “However start slow — if your baby seems to hate getting a regular bath, revert to the sponge bath method for another week or longer.”

To give your baby a traditional bath, Dr. Marathe recommends the following tips:

1. **Prepare ahead of time.** Decide where to bathe your baby, such as a sink or a small plastic tub, which can make the task easier. Gather a wash cloth, a mild, fragrance-free baby soap, and a baby shampoo if your baby has hair.
2. **Place your baby in the water.** First, fill your baby’s bath with lukewarm water. Test the temperature of the water on the inside of your wrist to ensure that it’s not too hot. Then, gently guide your baby into the water, feet first. Most of your baby’s body should be well above the water, so occasionally pour warm water over your baby’s body for warmth.
3. **Start with your baby’s head.** Use the washcloth to gently wash your baby’s face and scalp. Use baby shampoo once or twice a week to clean your baby’s hair.
4. **Clean the rest of the body.** Soap only really needs to be applied to dirty areas; the neck and diaper area are usually sufficient. Use the washcloth and baby soap to gently clean your baby. Don’t forget to clean between your baby’s fingers and toes. Make sure to rinse off any soap after cleaning.

“After bathing, immediately wrap your baby in a towel for warmth and consider applying a bland, fragrance-free moisturizer, such as petroleum jelly,” says Dr. Marathe. “If you have questions about how to care for your baby’s skin, see a board-certified dermatologist.”

These tips are demonstrated in “[How to Bathe Your Newborn](#),” a video posted to the AAD website and [YouTube channel](#). This video is part of the AAD’s “Video of the Month” series, which offers tips people can use to properly care for their skin, hair and nails.

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