

## Your Newborn's First 24 Hours: What to Expect



### Highlights

Your midwife or doctor will check your baby soon after birth.  
When your baby is born, they may have blood and vernix on their skin.  
You may have your first breastfeed during skin-to-skin time, soon after birth.  
Your baby's first poo is black and sticky - this is called meconium.  
Make sure that you know how to put your baby to sleep safely.

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## **First Day with Your Newborn**

The first 24 hours after the birth of your baby is a critical time, not just for your newborn but also for you as a new parent. It can be overwhelming to think about what to expect, but understanding the key events and milestones can help guide you through this initial period.

## **Understanding Apgar Scores**

The Apgar score is an assessment of your baby's physical condition immediately after birth. It evaluates five key factors:

Heart rate  
Breathing  
Colour  
Muscle tone  
Reflexes

The Apgar score is typically measured at 1 minute and 5 minutes after birth, and occasionally at 10 minutes if necessary. The maximum score is 10. A score of 7 or above generally indicates that your baby is doing well and adjusting to life outside the womb.

It's important to note that while the Apgar score is an indication of your baby's immediate well-being, it does not predict long-term health, intelligence, or development.

## **Measuring Your Baby**

After birth, one of the first things your healthcare provider will do is weigh your baby, measure their length, and take the head circumference. These measurements are important for tracking your baby's growth and ensuring that they are developing appropriately. These initial measurements will be used in future health checks and recorded on growth charts, helping you and your

healthcare team monitor your baby's health over time.

## **Skin-to-Skin and Bonding**

Skin-to-skin contact in the first hour after birth is a valuable practice. It helps to promote bonding between you and your baby and plays an important role in stabilizing your baby's vital signs. The benefits of skin-to-skin contact include:

- Supporting the establishment of breastfeeding
- Helping regulate the baby's body temperature
- Stabilizing heart rate and breathing patterns

In the case of a caesarean section, skin-to-skin contact is still possible and encouraged after delivery. This intimate bonding time is vital for your newborn's emotional development and your connection to each other.

## **What Your Newborn May Look Like**

Your newborn may be covered in blood or vernix, which is a white, creamy substance that protected their skin while in the uterus. This is completely normal and will be wiped off shortly after birth.

If you had an assisted delivery, such as using forceps or a vacuum, your baby may have some swelling or bruising on their head, which will go away after a few days.

In cases where a baby is overdue, their skin might appear slightly dry or cracked, as the vernix would have been absorbed before birth. Additionally, small pink or red marks, known as birthmarks, may appear on their forehead, eyelids, or neck. These are often called stork marks or salmon patches, and they typically fade within a few weeks.

## **Delivering the Placenta & Cutting the Cord**

After your baby is born, you will experience a few more contractions to deliver the placenta, which marks the third stage of labor. Once the placenta is delivered, the umbilical cord will be clamped, and your healthcare provider or

your support person may cut it.

A small portion of the cord will remain attached to your baby's belly button, called the umbilical stump. It's important to keep this area clean and dry to prevent infection. Your healthcare provider will give you instructions on how to care for the stump.

### **Cord Blood Testing for Rh-Negative Mothers**

If you have Rh-negative blood, a small amount of your baby's blood will be taken from the umbilical cord and tested to determine your baby's blood type. If your baby is Rh-positive, you will be offered an injection of anti-D to prevent your body from producing antibodies that could harm future pregnancies.

### **Vitamin K for Newborns**

Vitamin K is essential for blood clotting. Newborns are often deficient in vitamin K in the first few days of life, which can put them at risk for a rare but serious condition known as Vitamin K Deficiency Bleeding (VKDB). VKDB can lead to severe bleeding, including brain bleeds, which can be fatal.

To reduce this risk, it is generally recommended that babies receive a vitamin K injection within a few hours of birth. This injection is given only with the parents' consent.

### **Feeding Your Baby**

If you plan to breastfeed, your baby may have their first feeding during the skin-to-skin contact period. Your healthcare provider or midwife will help you with positioning and attachment to ensure that breastfeeding is successful. If you're unable to breastfeed immediately, don't worry. Your midwife can teach you how to express milk or use formula until your baby is ready.

The first milk produced by your body is called colostrum. It is thick and yellowish, and although you may only produce a small amount, it's perfectly suited for your baby, as their stomach is very tiny.

During the first 24 hours, your baby may feed quite frequently, anywhere from 8

to 12 times or more. This may gradually decrease as your milk comes in, and your baby begins to take larger amounts.

Signs that your baby is hungry include:

- Restlessness or squirming
- Sucking on their hands
- Making murmuring or rooting sounds
- Turning their head and opening their mouth

If you need help with breastfeeding, don't hesitate to ask a lactation consultant or midwife for guidance.

## **Newborn Sleep Patterns**

Newborns typically sleep between 14 to 17 hours in a 24-hour period, though this sleep is often broken up into 6 to 8 shorter periods. Each period of sleep can last anywhere from 2 to 4 hours.

It's important to be familiar with safe sleep practices to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Always lay your baby on their back to sleep, on a firm mattress, and keep the sleep area free of soft bedding.

## **Baby's First Poos and Wees**

Your baby's first poop, known as meconium, will be black and sticky. Over the next few days, their stool will change in color, transitioning from greenish-brown to yellow as they start processing breast milk.

In the first 24 hours, your baby should have at least one wet nappy. As their digestive system matures, you'll notice changes in the consistency and color of their urine and stools.

## **Your Baby's Hearing**

Your baby has been hearing sounds while in the womb, including your voice and other environmental noises. After birth, they will recognize your voice, which can be comforting to them.

Talking or singing to your baby in a soft, calm voice can help them relax and develop important language skills.

## **Your Baby's Vision**

Newborns can see objects that are close to them, typically about 8 to 12 inches away. Things farther than that will appear blurred. Over time, their eyesight will improve, and they will be able to see more clearly.

At first, your baby's eyes may appear to wander in different directions, which is normal and should correct itself by 3 months of age. If you're concerned about your baby's eye movements or vision, consult your pediatrician or healthcare provider.

Your baby's eye color may change during the first few months of life, as it can take some time for the final color to develop.

## **Tools and Assistance**

The first 24 hours can be a time of adjustment, and support is available. For more information and advice, you can speak with your doctor or midwife. If you need help with breastfeeding, you can consult with a lactation consultant or join a support group.

There are also various organizations available to help new parents with emotional support or practical advice, such as:

Local maternal health services

Parenting support organizations

Helplines and websites for perinatal anxiety and depression support

Adjusting to life with a newborn can be both joyful and challenging, and it's perfectly normal to ask for help when you need it.