

Comprehensive Guide to Your Newborn's Health: From Head to Toe



Highlights

Learning about newborn baby health helps parents understand what's normal and when to see a doctor.

Babies have natural reflexes, like sucking and rooting, which are examined during regular health checks.

A healthy newborn will show a range of normal reflexes and behaviors, which change as they grow in their first weeks and months.

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General Observations

Welcoming a newborn baby into the world is an exciting and sometimes challenging time for families. Understanding the basics of newborn baby health can help you enjoy this special time, recognize what is normal, what to expect, and when to seek medical attention.

Reflexes

Babies are born with reflexes that help them adjust to life outside the uterus. A reflex is an automatic response that your baby doesn't need to learn - these are movements or responses that happen automatically.

Newborn reflexes include:

Sucking \ (to drink milk from the breast or a bottle\)

Rooting \ (turning their head and opening their mouth when the side of their mouth is touched to help them find the nipple and start feeding\)

Moro \ (startle reflex\)

Palmar \ (grasp reflex\)

Muscle Tone

A sign of healthy muscle tone is if your newborn can move their arms and legs (they are not limp or 'floppy').

Irritability

Many newborns cry or are unsettled as part of normal newborn behavior. This can be difficult for parents, but usually, no medical attention is needed.

Head

FontanelleThe fontanelles are the 'soft spots' on a newborn baby's skull. They should feel soft and flat. A bulging or sunken fontanelle may indicate health issues and should be checked by a doctor.

Head ShapeA baby's head shape can be influenced by birth. It is common for head shape to change in the first few weeks. If the head shape appears flat or uneven, or if the baby only turns their head to one side, consult a healthcare professional.

Eyes

A baby's eyes should be clear and alert. Most babies are born with blue or grey eyes, which may change in the first year. Babies can only focus on objects close to them in the first weeks.

Nose

Newborns breathe mainly through their noses in the first few months. A blocked nose can make feeding difficult.

Mouth

Newborns usually have 20 baby teeth developing under the gums. Proper oral care from birth helps maintain good oral health.

Ears

Newborns can hear sounds from birth. Ear infections are common but usually not

serious. Avoid inserting anything into a baby's ears to clean them.

Neck

A newborn's neck should move freely. Swollen glands are common and usually resolve on their own, but any unusual lumps should be checked by a doctor.

Skin

Newborn skin is sensitive and requires gentle care. Avoid harsh soaps and direct sunlight. Healthcare providers check the skin for any conditions during routine health checks.

Chest and Breathing

Breathing RateA healthy newborn breathes between 25 and 60 times per minute. Babies may have irregular breathing patterns, which usually resolve by six months. Seek medical attention if a baby has difficulty breathing, grunting, or coughing excessively.

Stomach

FeedingNewborns have small stomachs and need frequent feeding, typically 8-12 times per day in the first few weeks.

Weight GainWeight and growth are indicators of a baby's health. Most babies lose some weight after birth but regain it by two weeks.

Normal Poos and Wees

Newborns urinate frequently. Bowel movements can vary in frequency and consistency, with changes being normal. However, persistent changes should be discussed with a doctor.

Vomiting

Spitting up milk occasionally is normal, but forceful vomiting may require medical attention.

Umbilical Cord Care

The umbilical stump usually falls off within two weeks. Keeping the area clean helps prevent infection.

Hips

Some newborns have loose hip joints at birth, which usually resolve naturally. Hip dysplasia requires medical attention.

Feet

Baby feet continue developing in early childhood. Foot movements should not be restricted by tight socks or bedding.

Tools And Assistance

If you have any concerns about your baby's health, here are some tools and resources that can help:

Pediatrician or Family Doctor: A pediatrician specializes in newborn and child health. They can provide guidance on your baby's development, answer any health-related questions, and help you address concerns regarding your baby's growth, feeding, and general well-being.

Midwife or Child Health Nurse: Midwives and child health nurses are trained to support parents and caregivers during the early days and weeks after birth. They can offer practical advice on newborn care, including feeding, sleep patterns, and general health checks.

Lactation Consultant: If you're planning to breastfeed or have difficulties with breastfeeding, a lactation consultant can assist with techniques and tips to ensure effective feeding. They are trained to help resolve common challenges, such as latch issues or low milk supply.

Online Parenting Resources: Many reputable health organizations and parenting websites offer free resources, including articles, videos, and expert advice on newborn care, feeding, and health.

Support Groups: Joining a parent support group can provide emotional support and practical advice from others going through similar experiences. These

groups may meet in person or provide online forums for discussion.

Baby Care Apps: Many apps are available to help track your baby's milestones, feeding, sleeping, and health-related changes. These apps can help you stay organized and provide you with important reminders for medical checkups and vaccinations.

Emergency Medical Services: If you notice any concerning symptoms in your baby, such as difficulty breathing, excessive vomiting, or abnormal reactions, don't hesitate to contact emergency medical services or visit your nearest urgent care center.

It's important to always trust your instincts as a parent and seek professional assistance when you feel it's necessary.