



Sharing Information

Newborn Behavior

Your Baby

Each newborn is an individual. He will differ from others in looks, feelings, movements, reactions, and his effects on his family.

For example:

- Some babies suck better than others.
- Some are awake longer and more frequently.
- Some respond more actively than others do to stimulation.
- Some can be soothed easily while others will need more stimulation.

The First Days

For 30 minutes to an hour after birth, infants are usually quietly alert, responding to a moving face and sounds near the ear. They will begin to explore their surroundings and relationships with the important people in their lives. Infants not in distress, are often able to stay with their parents immediately after birth. This is an important time for attachment and bonding to begin.

The infant then goes into a deep sleep, often curled in a fetal position, rarely crying. The only movements might be a startle or changes in breathing. Only strong stimulation may disturb him. It takes time to adjust to the birth process and the outside world. All the energy he has goes to eating and digesting.

Facts About Infants

An infant's heart rate is usually twice as fast as an adult's - about 120 beats per minute.

An infant may have a wet diaper up to 18 times in 24 hours and have 4 - 7 bowel movements.

An infant breathes twice as fast as an adult - about 30 - 40 times a minute.

Most infants sleep 14 - 18 hours of a 24 hour day.

How A Newborn Protects Himself

A newborn has many reflexes which help to protect him from too much light, from pain, and from other stimulation. There are also reflexes necessary for survival. For several days after birth his gag reflex helps him spit up mucus so he can breathe better. A strong blink reflex protects his eyes from too much light. When on his tummy, he will lift his head and turn it to one side. He will avoid pain by turning away.

The infant's brain learns from all these experiences.

Sense Perception

Satisfaction and pleasure are the only emotions clearly noticed in newborns. They learn to do such things as distinguish people from objects, expect food at certain times, focus attention on a new thing, grasp your finger when it is placed in his palm and show interest in the human face.

Taste And Smell

Neither of these senses are highly developed at birth. Bitter substances cause reactions of displeasure, while sweet fluids are readily accepted. Newborns are indifferent to certain flavors. They do not like foul odors.

Touch

The first impressions of life come from touch. Knowledge of people is gained through touch. For example, mother is gentle, comforting and confident. An infant can sense the anxiety, anger or annoyance of his caregiver.

Sight

A newborn cannot focus well and does not see close objects clearly. Bright lights and flashes from a camera will not harm his vision, but can be uncomfortable. He prefers patterns to solids and finds the human face interesting. Black and white pictures or patterns are most likely to attract his attention.

Hearing

Babies are born hearing. They actually prefer certain sounds to others. They will turn their heads to search for a voice. Newborns respond to the human voice.

The Sick Infant

The hospitalized newborn may show somewhat different behaviors from those described for a healthy infant. A premature infant seems less controlled and coordinated in his movements than does a full-term infant. Your doctor will let you know if your baby's development is progressing as it should. You can help by letting him know behaviors that you observe in your child.

Crying

For a newborn, most crying and discomfort comes from feelings within his body: hunger, thirst, tiredness, passing gas, or stool. Taking care of the infants' needs will usually help him settle down. An infant may be distressed due to a noisy, busy, or active day. Sometimes placing the baby on his stomach will help control the startling that accompanies his crying. Your infant may be calm, easily quieted, and happy playing by himself. Another infant may be fussy, startle easily, and need more constant attention. Both infants show different, normal, healthy behaviors.

You may notice a pattern to your infant's crying. It may occur at the same time each day. Recognizing this cry can help you plan ways to lessen it. Rocking, holding, burping may help. Some

infants are crying as a way to relieve tension and as a release before sleep. A period of 5 - 10 minutes of crying is not harmful. Infants should not be allowed to "cry it out". Remember that crying is your baby's only way to communicate. If your baby's continued crying causes you to feel extremely worried, discuss this with your pediatrician. It may be helpful for you to find support and help in the care of you and your baby.

Going Home

Infants are usually off schedule for several days after going home. They may cry a lot and eat poorly or frequently. They may breathe irregularly or spit up occasionally, and startle frequently. After they have adjusted to their new surroundings, patterns and routines will develop.

Summary

Each infant is different in response, behavior, physical, emotional, and social needs. Growth charts and developmental scales are only guidelines. Your infant is a unique and special individual.

As your infant grows you will become sensitive to his needs and recognize what is normal for him. Always discuss concerns or questions you have with your doctor. There are no unimportant or dumb questions.



Children's Hospital

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