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Keep Your Baby Clean!

Are you doing enough for your adorable newborn? Besides ensuring timely feeds and sleep hours, you need to focus on good hygiene - for your baby and yourself! Protect her from germs to keep her happy and smiling. **Kavita Devgan** speaks to the experts

Baby hygiene decoded

Your newborn's immunity is at a very nascent stage, and the only protection she has from infection is the short-lived immunity passed from mother to baby in the womb. Good hygiene is of paramount importance, not only to keep her disease-free, but is also the best way to ensure that she's less irritable and cranky. Here are some pointers to ensure proper hygiene, and a happy baby.

Bathe her right

Don't use soap or shampoo till your baby is at least 14-days-old, as her skin is very raw and tender. Post her first fortnight, use only liquid soap or shampoo as a soap bar tends to close the pores of the skin. Until the navel area is fully healed, just give your baby a sponge bath. Place her on a waterproof pad, changing mat, or a soft towel in a warm room, wrap her nicely in another towel and expose only the area to be washed. First wash the baby's face without soap. Then use mildly soapy water for the rest of the body. Make sure you clean the armpits, behind the ears, around the neck, the genital region and the diaper area properly. Clean the ears properly, but gently. You only need to wipe the outer ear and the entrance to the ear canal with a wet finger, not inside. Don't use a cotton swab in your baby's ears; it could damage the

eardrum. Keep the stump of the umbilical cord clean and dry until it falls off (it usually falls off in a few weeks). Clean the area with a cotton swab dipped in plain water during each diaper-change to prevent infection and wipe with dry cotton. Avoid using alcohol or any antiseptic there. Clean the nappy area thoroughly to keep nappy rash at bay and avoid infection. With girls, always clean from front to back. Once your baby's navel area has healed, you can put her directly into a sink, plastic tub, or Bathinette. Shampoo her hair once or twice a week.

Wash hands properly

When she's older, your child should be taught to wash her hands regularly; just this one precaution can help keep infections and diseases away. Till they're old enough to do it themselves, do it for them. But just washing is not enough, it's important to wash right! Lather up well with soap and rub hands together for at least 15 seconds. Maybe sing a song for that duration or recite the alphabet (when they are older teach them to sing themselves). Dry the hands thoroughly. Choose a liquid soap that comes in a dispenser; it'll be easy for them to operate and fun to use.

Nail care

It's important to keep her nails trimmed not just to prevent her from



Mothers' hygiene counts too!

Ensure that your hands are completely clean. To reduce any risk of infection, wash your hands with antibacterial soap or liquid handwash. These are better equipped to fight germs than ordinary soap and help protect you and your child from harmful bacteria. Make sure you wash your hands before handling food for your child, after using the toilet or changing nappies, after contact with blood or body fluids such as vomit, saliva and nasal secretions, before preparing a feed or bottle, before and after giving medication and first aid, after touching a rubbish bin, after handling pets, and of course, whenever you come home from outside.

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scratching herself but also to avoid any build-up of dirt and germs under the nails. A baby's nails are soft and easy to cut. The best time to trim them is after a bath or when the baby is sleeping. Use a baby-size nail clipper or small scissors with blunt-ended blades. Clip nails only after her first fortnight, since until that time, the nail is attached very closely to the nail bed. Never trim a baby's nails by biting them off as this may put the baby at risk of infection.

Oral hygiene

Don't wait for the teeth to appear; start right away. Wipe the child's gums with a wet gauze-wrapped finger after feedings to remove any food residue; this will prevent any plaque from building up. When the baby's mouth begins to fill up with teeth, use a toothbrush for babies and a half-pea-sized bit of toothpaste (specific infant toothpastes are available) to clean the gums, teeth and tongue.

Diaper dos

Mostly, diaper rash results from skin irritation caused by sensitive skin exposed to chemicals and moisture from urine and stools, and soiled diapers that are left on for too long. So how can you prevent or minimise diaper rash? Wash well – rinse your baby's bottom with water after each diaper change to wash all the stool and urine away. Remember to wash it, not just wipe it. Use unscented, alcohol-free wipes or just plain water – these are less irritating. Moisturise the area as well – sensitive bottoms need cream, coconut oil, Vaseline, or desi ghee as the skin gets dry because of repeated



Teach them right

Make sure your child learns good hygiene right from the beginning:

- ✓ Teach them how to clean their gums and brush their teeth properly. Ideally after major meals, but definitely twice a day – morning and evening.
- ✓ Bathing should be non-negotiable. Don't allow shortcuts – such as just a sponge – to get your child into a regular habit. Ideally fix up his bath-time and encourage him to have a nightly cleaning ritual too.
- ✓ Lead by example. Let your child watch you perform your daily ablutions. If he sees you wash your face thoroughly at night before going to bed, he will emulate you. This way, he'll pick up the right habits as well.

- ✓ Make sure your child is comfortable asking you questions about her body and yours. Be direct in your answers.
- ✓ Allow her to choose her own shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush and loofah. Not only is this fun but also ensures better compliance in your child.
- ✓ Explain to your child how important it is to use clean clothing. Teach him to put his socks and underwear in the laundry every night.
- ✓ Give your child a basic understanding about the spread of germs and the importance of good hygiene to prevent diseases.
- ✓ Teach your child to cover her mouth and nose with a tissue or handkerchief while sneezing and coughing.
- ✓ Always compliment your child's efforts at good hygiene, as this will reinforce good behaviour.



washes. Pat your baby dry with a soft clean towel. Don't scrub your baby's bottom. Scrubbing can further irritate the skin. Never over-tighten diapers since this prevents airflow into the diaper region, setting up a moist environment that's causes diaper rashes. To check whether the diaper fits comfortably, gently insert your index finger between the edge of the diaper and her belly – your finger should be able to move freely. Give your baby's bottom a little breathing room. Whenever possible, let your baby go without a diaper. Let her skin dry completely before putting on another diaper. If you use the cloth diaper, wash cloth diapers carefully with hot water and double-rinse them.

Use a mild detergent, and skip the fabric softeners and dryer sheets because these can contain fragrances that may irritate your baby's tender skin.

Caring for toys



Have you seen a child who doesn't like to put a toy in his mouth? Highly unlikely! This is why it's important to decontaminate playthings before reuse to prevent infection travelling to your baby. Hard toys should be washed and then rinsed with an antiseptic liquid, and soft toys laundered in a washing machine. Don't allow pets to share your children's toys at any cost.

Preparing the bottle



Wash all feeding equipment in hot soapy water. Use a bottle brush to clean any food deposits. Ensure that the nipples are cleaned; wash from both sides and keep under running water for a while. To sterilise, either boil the bottle for 15 minutes, and teats for three minutes once the water starts boiling, or use a steam steriliser and sterilising solution. When preparing the feed, make sure that bottles, nipples, formula scoops, and hands are completely sanitised.

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