

# KEEPING My Baby Healthy AFTER DISCHARGE

**Y**our baby has graduated from the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) and you are finally home! Although you may want to throw a big party with lots of people to celebrate your little one's homecoming, you should try to live quietly at home getting to know your baby at first. Because their immune systems are not yet fully developed, babies are more at risk for catching germs, which can lead to infections, when compared to older children and adults. The good news is that there is a lot that you can do to help keep your baby healthy at home.



## TIPS THAT MAY HELP KEEP YOUR BABY HEALTHY

**VISITORS**— Make sure you follow your healthcare provider's recommendations about the number of visitors you should have in your home, and the number of people who can touch and hold your baby. Be firm and do not let people who are ill come to visit your new baby.

**OUTINGS**— You may wonder when it is OK to take your new baby outside. Because a newborn's immune system is not yet fully developed, you may want to limit outings to crowded places, like the mall or supermarket, for the first few months or longer during the cold and flu seasons. Also, since pediatricians and other healthcare providers often treat people with viral and bacterial infections, when you bring your baby for scheduled immunizations, you may want to request that you wait in an examination room away from those who seem ill.

**FEEDING**— This is the most basic key activity between a parent and a baby. Not only are you giving important nourishment to your baby, but you are nourishing your relationship as well. After being in the NICU, it may be scary to think that you alone are responsible for feeding your baby. How will you know if he or she is getting enough? Take comfort in knowing that often your baby's appetite may go up and down. While your healthcare provider will advise you what your baby should eat over a 24-hour period, it is not necessary that a certain amount is eaten at each feeding. Some babies are more hungry in the morning, while others want to eat more at a later time in the day.

**SLEEPING**— Your baby may have slept on his or her tummy in the NICU, but at home, it is extremely important that you put your baby to sleep on his or her back. The "back to sleep" campaign supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development states that putting babies to sleep on their backs helps reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). In addition, make sure your baby's crib mattress is firm. Remember to remove all pillows and stuffed animals from the crib before putting your baby to sleep.

**HAND WASHING**— This simple guideline will help reduce the risk of infection for your baby. Everyone who wants to touch or hold your baby should wash their hands before doing so. Parents, caretakers, siblings, friends and other relatives should make hand washing a habit — especially after changing a diaper, wiping their nose, coughing, or using the bathroom. Germs are spread quickly by touch, and what may be a minor cold to you could possibly become a major infection for your baby.



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## When Do I Call My Baby's Healthcare Provider?

As you get to know your baby better each day, you will develop a gut instinct that will tell you if and when something is not quite right and your baby needs to see a healthcare provider.

Below are some guidelines that may help you understand when you should seek medical attention. As always, contact your baby's healthcare provider immediately if you are uncomfortable or uncertain about your baby's health.

### CALL YOUR BABY'S HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF YOUR BABY:

- has a seizure
- has blood in the stool or vomit
- has trouble breathing, very fast breathing, or a change in breathing pattern
- has a blue tint on lips, fingertips, or on the skin
- is injured, won't stop bleeding, or hurt his head
- has a fever above 100.4°F (38°C) or below 97.8°F (36.6°C) when taken rectally
- is jaundiced, yellow color of skin or whites of the eyes
- is hard to wake, more tired and less active than usual
- drinks or eats dangerous or harmful nonfoods, such as detergents, bleach, or pest control products, as these substances can cause harm
- is crying and more irritable than usual or can not be comforted
- vomits (not spit-up) more than 2–3 times a day
- has a change in bowel habits, frequent diarrhea, or is constipated
- urinates less frequently, fewer than six wet diapers in 24 hours
- refuses to eat, or if your baby's appetite changes

*Don't hesitate to contact your baby's healthcare provider if you have any concerns about your baby's health.*

*Source: March of Dimes®*

**This information is for educational purposes only and is not intended to substitute for professional medical advice. Always consult with a healthcare professional if you have any questions about the health of your child.**