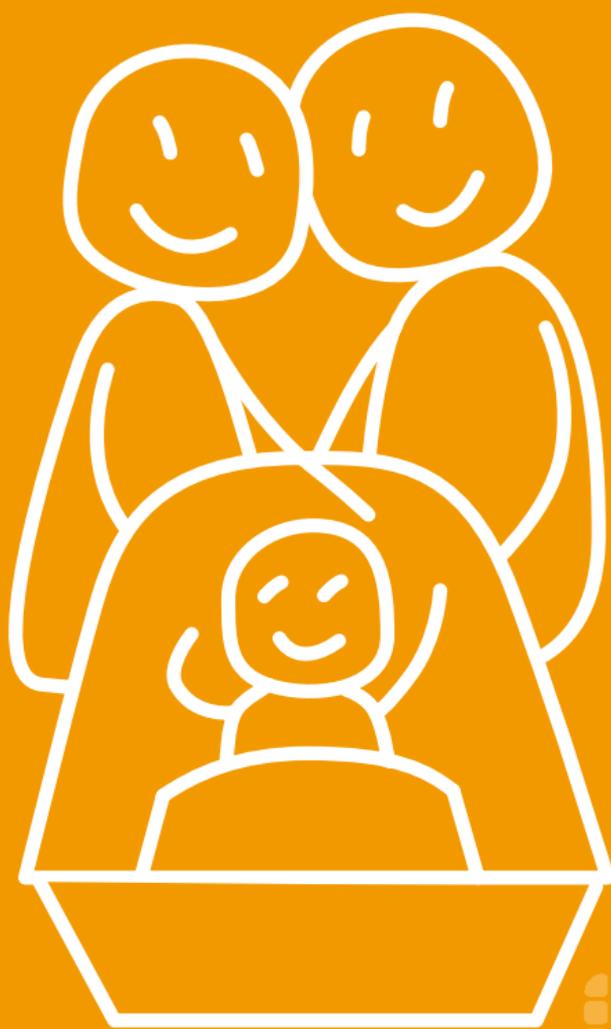


about babies



These days many parents have not had a lot of experience with babies until their first baby comes along. If you are one of these parents you will probably find you have many questions about this new person who has come into your life and who is so small and helpless. It can be overwhelming and scary when you realise your baby is so dependent on you for everything, especially if you feel you don't know a lot about babies. Understanding what babies are like may help to make it easier to care for your baby.

What are babies like?

Babies do some things 'automatically' without knowing they are doing them. These are called reflexes.

- For example, if something is put in their mouths they suck on it (sucking reflex), and if something is put in their hands they hold on tight (grasp reflex). If they are startled or upset they fling their arms out and throw their heads back (startle reflex).

Babies' heads can sometimes be uneven in shape after the birth or because of the way they sleep.

- This is called plagiocephaly.

The '**soft spots**' (fontanelles) on top of a baby's head are there so the baby's bones can move a little, so that the baby can more easily fit through the birth passage when he is being born.

- These spots will usually close over in the baby's first year or so.

- The skin over the soft spots is strong and you cannot hurt babies by gently washing or brushing their heads.
- Sometimes a fontanelle swells when the baby is crying and goes flat when the crying stops.

Many babies have **jaundice** (yellow skin and eyes) during the first week or so after birth.

Cradle cap is a yellowish, patchy, greasy, scaly and crusty skin rash that occurs on the scalp of recently born babies.

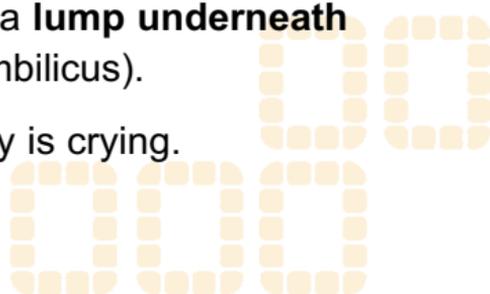
- You can put on olive oil or other vegetable oil, or baby oil to soften the scales one evening and wash the oil off the next day.
- Gently lift off the softened scales with a soft brush (such as a soft toothbrush), fine-toothed comb or fingernail.
- If some of the scales are sticking to the surface of the scalp, use the oil again the next night. Do not use much pressure to scrape off the scales as this could damage the underlying skin.
- If it does not improve see your doctor.

Some babies have a **sticky eye** due to a blocked tear duct (usually only one side, but it may be on both sides).

- Ask your doctor how to manage this. It is not serious. See the topic '**Your baby's eyes**'.

Your baby's umbilicus (belly button) may take several days to heal fully, and many babies have umbilical hernias.

- An umbilical hernia is a **lump underneath their belly button** (umbilicus).
- It may swell if the baby is crying.



- This is a small gap in the ‘tummy’ muscles and will nearly always go away in time.
- It does not need treatment and does not cause health problems.
- Sometimes small hernias develop in the groin (called inguinal hernias). A small lump can be felt, especially when the baby is crying. These are much more serious, and you need to have your baby checked by a doctor as soon as possible.

Babies are often born with **large genitals and breasts** and sometimes ‘milk’ even comes from the breasts.

- This swelling is due to the mother’s hormones, it is normal (even for boys) and it does not last long.
- Don’t try to squeeze any milk out of the breasts, as too much pressure can sometimes cause an infection. Expressing the milk could also mean that the breasts go on making it for longer (similar to mothers expressing milk when breast feeding).
- If the breasts become larger, firm and tender, and your baby seems unwell, there could be an infection, and you would need to take your baby to your doctor, but this does not happen often.

Most babies have **spots on their faces** and often on parts of the body in the first few weeks.

- They are called **milium**, and can look like acne – red spots with white centres. They are not acne and they do not need any treatment.

- They seem to be a reaction to the skin being exposed to air rather than to fluid in the womb (uterus) before birth.
- Sometimes the spots come when the baby gets hot or has been lying on that side. If they go away within an hour or so they are probably this kind of spot.

Lots of babies have **hiccups** after feeds.
This is normal.

Some babies **spill some milk** after feeds.

- If they are growing well and happy this is nothing to worry about.
- If your baby is bringing up milk in big spurts much of the time you need to see your doctor. (See the topic '**Reflux**' for more information.)
- If your baby is not putting on weight or is miserable a lot of the time, talk to your doctor or child health nurse.

Very young breastfed babies usually do several '**poos**' a day.

- Even if your baby seems to be pushing hard, the poo is usually very soft. After a few weeks some breastfed babies only have a poo every few days and it will still be soft. All this is normal.

Bottle fed babies might have firmer poos.

- If the poos seem very hard, try a teaspoon of brown sugar in a little boiled water inbetween feeds (once or twice). Don't keep doing this after the poos are soft again.



A little light **pink or orange stain** from urine on the nappy is not uncommon and is nothing to worry about.

- It is caused by a reaction between chemicals in the baby's urine (urates) and chemicals in the fibres of the nappy.
- It is more likely in boys because their stream of wee (urine) is more likely to be all in the same place on the nappy (diaper).
- If it is red or leaves a brown stain, that is, if it looks at all like blood or your baby seems unwell and is not feeding normally you need to have it checked by a doctor.
- Sometimes there can be small 'crystals' on the inner surface of a disposable nappy. These come from the inside of the nappy, not from the baby.
- See '**Poos, wees and nappies**'.

Many babies **cry** for up to three hours, or sometimes more, a day in the early weeks.

- Most babies like being held and comforted.
- Some babies still cry when they are being held.
- See '**Crying baby**' and '**Colic in Babies**' for more information.

What can your baby do?

Remember that every baby is different.

While babies usually follow similar patterns with their development, your baby might do things faster or slower or differently from other babies and this is usually fine. If your baby is doing things much more slowly or not doing some

things at all, it is a good idea to check with your doctor to make sure that all is going well.

Here are some of the things your baby will probably be able to do.

- By **six or seven weeks (or earlier)** he can smile at you when you smile at him.
- By **two months** he can hold up his head when you are holding him upright and lift his head up if he is lying on his tummy. By this time many babies are already 'talking' – making some noises, then listening to you make noises back, then making some more!
- By **three months** he will enjoy hitting toys that make a noise and he can hold a rattle for a short time.
- By **four months** he may be able to roll from his front to his back, but it may be another couple of months, or more, before he can roll from his back to his front.
- By **seven months** he will be sitting up and might be starting to crawl.
- By **nine months** many babies can pull themselves up to stand. Some babies take longer. It takes another two or three months or so before he can stand without holding onto something and then a few more weeks before he can actually walk.
- By **twelve months** babies will talk to you in their own language, and expect you to understand. They may say one or two clear words – probably one of them will be 'No!'. They can understand some words. Your baby will be able to hold something with his thumb and forefinger and play little games like wave goodbye and 'pat-a-cake'.

What can my baby see, hear, taste and feel?

- Although babies can **see** when they are born they cannot yet see as clearly as older people.
- Newborn babies can **hear** lots of different sounds but they can't yet hear as well as they will by the end of the first year.
- Gentle, caring **touch** is very important so babies feel loved and cared for. They are sensitive to touch from the time they are born and can feel pain.
- Babies can tell different tastes such as salty, sweet, sour and bitter tastes. They do not need salt or sugar on their foods when they start eating solids and they learn to like the **tastes** they are given.
- Babies can smell from the time they are born and sometimes turn their heads away or 'make a face' if there is a **smell** or taste they don't like.

Baby's teeth

- Some babies have little **white lumps** like tiny pearls in their mouth, especially on the gums. These are normal and go away when the baby grows.
- Babies usually start to get their teeth at about six months and usually have all their baby teeth by the time they are three. These teeth need to be looked after and brushed.
- Avoid giving bottles of juice or milk at bedtime. The sugars in these drinks stay in the mouth and can cause decay.

- Some don't have any until they are a year old and occasionally a baby is born with a tooth.

Nails

Many young babies get a small infection next to a finger nail or toe nail (called paronychia).

- Usually this clears away without treatment (or with using a little waterbased antiseptic cream or lotion) but sometimes an infection can spread into the skin of the finger or toe around the nail and there can be swelling and redness of the skin. If this happens you need to have it checked by your doctor as your baby may need an antibiotic.

Looking after the penis

- For most male babies and many young boys the foreskin is attached to the glans (tip of the penis).
- Forcing it away from the glans may cause damage to the tip of the penis or the foreskin – so it is best not to force back an infant's foreskin. The foreskin will become looser as your baby gets older.
- Like every other part of the body the tip of the penis and underneath the foreskin should be cleaned regularly once foreskin moves easily.
- Boys should learn how to wash their penis and balls (scrotum), as they are taught to wash other parts of their body.
- Don't use soap when washing foreskins because it can irritate the skin.



- When the foreskin moves back more easily, boys should be encouraged to wash under the foreskin every time they bath or shower. The white stuff (smegma) under the foreskin is natural and does not cause health problems – it simply needs to be washed away regularly.

Fused labia

The labia (the folds of skin on either side of the opening of the vagina) may be stuck together in girls aged from about six months to six years.

- They always separate by later childhood, when the levels of oestrogen in the body start to rise at the beginning of puberty.
- For some girls, they may need to be separated at a younger age if the girl has an infection of the skin around the labia, or a bladder infection.

Vaginal blood loss

- Some female babies have a small vaginal blood loss a few days after birth. This loss is due to the change in hormone levels after birth causing a brief menstrual 'period'. This bleeding stops after a day or two. There will not be any more vaginal blood loss until the girl reaches puberty and starts to have periods.

Reminders

- Every baby is different even in the same family.
- The best way to get to know what babies are like is to watch and learn from your own baby.
- Babies grow and learn faster than they will at any other stage of life, so what they do will be continually changing.
- Take time to enjoy the new things your baby is learning and doing.
- If you have questions, ask for information. Most other parents have exactly the same question.
- Ask for help if you have any worries about your baby. This shows you are interested in learning about your baby and that you care.

For more information contact:

- Local Community Child Health Nurse
- Local Family Doctor
- Ngala Family Resource Centre Helpline
8:00am–8:00pm 7 days a week
Telephone (08) 9368 9368
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 111 546
www.ngala.com.au
- Parent Help Centre/Parenting Line
Telephone (08) 6279 1200 (24hr service)
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 654 432

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