

## 6 Reasons to Delay Baby's First Bath

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Delaying Your Baby's Bath Has Benefits



There are many reasons to consider not having your baby bathed in the first hours or even days after birth. Many hospitals seem to have an urgent need to have the baby bathed in the first hours after the newborn has been born, but as parents, you can make the decision on when to bathe your baby and who is the one to do it. There are several benefits to delaying baby's first bath and you may reconsider when you would like it to happen after learning about the advantages of waiting. (Much of the research on bathing newborns is related to the preterm or low birth weight baby.)

### 1. Babies are born with a natural skin protectant

In utero, babies are protected from their watery environment by a special substance called vernix, found on their skin. You may notice some vernix on your just born baby, it looks a bit like a white, waxy cream cheese, and some babies seem to have a lot and others not so much. Babies tend to lose the vernix the longer the mother is pregnant, so those babies born at 42 weeks might not have a lot of it visible anymore, though usually there is still some hidden in the folds of their skin and under their arms. Babies born earlier often have a larger amount. Newer research indicates that vernix has immune properties and leaving it on your baby's skin provides a layer of protection while your new baby's immune system is getting stronger. I think this is a great benefit especially for babies who are born in the hospital, with lots of potential for exposure to hospital-acquired infections. Vernix also is the best moisturizer

ever and helps to keep your baby's skin soft and supple. It's important to note that the research is on the properties of the vernix but as of now there is no clinical data to prove this connection.

Amniotic fluid, which bathed the baby before birth has the ability to provide some extra resistance to infection as well, so the longer it remains on the skin, the better for baby.

## **2. Baby wants to be near mom**

After birth, your newborn baby wants to be as close to you and your breasts as he can get. Snuggling on your chest, close to the food source, where he can hear you, smell you and feel you against his skin is a source of comfort for your new little one. Being close to your breasts can help encourage breastfeeding and support the baby making a smooth transition to life on the outside. Taking your baby away from you soon after birth for the purpose of a bath can disrupt the process of your baby getting to know you, feeling safe and secure, and interfere with those very important first feedings.

## **3. Lowered body temperature**

New babies are still figuring out how to maintain their own body temperature. Taking a baby away from his mother for a bath, may result in the baby working harder to keep their body temperature in the normal range. I have seen babies who need to be placed under the heat lamp to bring up their temperature after their bath. Mom's chest is the perfect place to maintain baby's temperature. A mother's chest has the ability to heat up or cool down to help the baby stay at just the right temperature. Adding a bath into the mix just makes it harder for baby to maintain their body temperature.

## **4. Keep stress hormones low and blood sugar normal**

Being separated from her mother can add an additional layer of stress to a new baby just figuring out life on the outside. When your baby is taken from you to be bathed, she may cry, feel uncomfortable and upset. This causes her body to release stress hormones in response to this new situation. Her heart rate and blood pressure may go up, she may breathe a bit faster and become agitated. Working hard to respond to this stressful situation may also lower her blood sugar temporarily. If your baby's blood sugar is being monitored due to mother's gestational diabetes, or her size at birth, the baby's health care providers may

be concerned and want to introduce formula to bring her blood sugar back up to the normal range. When she remains close to you, she is better able to regulate all of her body systems and maintain her blood sugar where it should be.

#### 5. A bath with mom or dad sounds nice

Since your baby feels most secure when she is close to a parent, you might consider taking the first bath with your baby, when you are ready. Getting in the tub with your baby and holding her in your arms is a wonderful way to have that first bath. Your baby will feel secure and loved, when she does not have to be separated from you in the first days. She will enjoy the soothing water while being held, happily splashing and giving little kicks. It might feel so good that she may even fall asleep! Remember, little babies are very slippery when wet, so you will need someone to hold the baby while you get in and out of the tub. It creates special memories to take that first bath with your baby, rather than having staff do it, shortly after birth, when mom is still recovering herself and not really able to engage in the process.

#### 6. Handle with gloves

In many hospitals, it is policy for staff to handle all unbathed babies with gloves on their hands, so as to protect staff from coming into contact with any amniotic fluid, blood, or vernix that remain on your newborn. Considering that the transmission of hospital-acquired infections is on the rise, some consider it good practice to have all hospital staff wear gloves when handling a newborn baby, even if a bath has already occurred. Some studies show glove use in very low birth weight babies have fewer infections when staff handle the baby with gloves on, despite the bath status.

There are many benefits to delaying the bath of your newborn until both you and baby are stable and ready to participate in this special "first" moment. There is no medical reason that a newborn must be bathed in the first hours or days. I encourage you to learn more about the appropriate time to bathe your baby and make a choice to do so when you and your baby are ready. Sharing your wishes with hospital staff can be done respectfully and your wishes can be honored.