



# Baby Care





# Baby Sign Language

Communicating with babies before they can speak can be challenging and often frustrating for both parents and infants.

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Many parents, however, are finding teaching their baby sign language can bridge this communication gap effectively. Baby sign language involves using simple hand gestures to convey words and concepts, enabling babies to express their needs and feelings before they develop verbal skills.

Baby sign language is not the same as American Sign Language (ASL), though it borrows some signs. It typically involves simplified gestures to represent common words and phrases such as “milk,” “more,” “all done,” “eat” and “sleep.” These signs are designed to be easy for little hands to form and for parents to remember and teach.

## **BENEFITS OF BABY SIGN LANGUAGE**

Teaching baby sign language can significantly reduce frustration for parents and babies. When babies can communicate their needs more effectively,

parents can respond appropriately, leading to a happier, more content baby. This improved communication can also foster a stronger bond between parent and child, as they share in the joy of understanding each other more clearly.

Moreover, research suggests babies who learn sign language may develop verbal skills earlier than their non-signing peers. This early language development is thought to occur because signing babies are actively engaging in the process of communication, which primes their brains for speech. Additionally, learning signs can enhance cognitive skills, such as memory and attention, by encouraging babies to associate specific gestures with words and concepts.

## **TEACHING SIGNS**

Introducing baby sign language can begin as early as six months, though some parents start even earlier. The key

is consistency and repetition. Choose a few basic signs to start with, such as “milk,” “more” and “all done.” Use these signs consistently during routine activities, like feeding, playing and bedtime.

For example, when offering milk, say the word “milk” while making the sign. Encourage your baby to mimic the sign, but be patient — it may take some time for them to start using the signs themselves. Reinforce the signs by using them frequently and responding positively when your baby attempts to use them.

Incorporating baby sign language into your daily routine can be a fun and engaging process. Use songs, books and games to reinforce the signs. Many parents find incorporating signs into nursery rhymes or simple songs helps to capture their baby’s attention and makes learning more enjoyable.

Reading books with repetitive phrases and accompanying each phrase with a

sign can be effective. For instance, a book about eating might include the sign for “eat” each time the word appears. This repetition helps to solidify the association between the sign and the word.

## **COMMON CHALLENGES AND TIPS**

Teaching baby sign language can come with challenges. Some parents worry signing might delay speech development, but research has shown it typically has the opposite effect. It’s important to always say the word aloud while signing, reinforcing the gesture is associated with verbal communication.

Another challenge is maintaining consistency. Ensure all caregivers are aware of and use the same signs to avoid confusing the baby. Consistency across different settings helps reinforce learning and encourages the baby to use the signs more frequently.

# Prevent and Treat Diaper Rash

Diaper rash is a common concern for parents, often causing discomfort for babies and stress for caregivers.

Understanding how to prevent and treat diaper rash keeps your baby's skin healthy and ensures they remain happy and comfortable.

Diaper rash typically appears as red, inflamed skin on the diaper-covered area, including the buttocks, thighs and genital area. It can be caused by several factors, including prolonged exposure to a wet or dirty diaper, friction, sensitivity to diaper materials and yeast or bacterial infections. Recognizing the early signs of diaper rash allows for prompt treatment and prevents further irritation.



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## PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Keeping your baby's skin dry is crucial in preventing diaper rash. Change diapers as soon as they are wet or soiled, typically every two to three hours for newborns and after every feeding for older infants.

Use mild, fragrance-free wipes or a soft cloth with warm water to clean your baby's diaper area. Avoid using wipes with alcohol or harsh chemicals, which can irritate sensitive skin. After cleaning, gently pat the area dry with a soft towel. Rubbing can cause

additional irritation, so be sure to pat rather than wipe.

Give your baby some diaper-free time each day to allow their skin to breathe and stay dry. Lay them on a soft towel or absorbent pad and let them enjoy some time without a diaper.

Apply a thick layer of barrier cream or ointment, such as zinc oxide or petroleum jelly, at each diaper change. These products protect the skin from moisture and reduce friction.

Ensure diapers are not too tight, as this can cause chafing and irritation. On the other

hand, diapers that are too loose may not keep moisture away from the skin effectively.

## TREATMENT OPTIONS

If you suspect a particular brand of diaper or wipe is causing the rash, switch to a different brand or type. Look for hypoallergenic and fragrance-free options.

Over-the-counter diaper rash creams containing zinc oxide or hydrocortisone can help reduce inflammation and promote healing. Apply these creams according to the package instructions.

Adding colloidal oatmeal to your baby's bath can soothe irritated skin and reduce inflammation. Make sure to thoroughly rinse and dry your baby's skin afterward.

If the diaper rash appears to be caused by a yeast infection (characterized by bright red, raised areas with small red bumps), your pediatrician may recommend an antifungal cream.

If the rash persists for more than a few days, worsens or is accompanied by fever, pus-filled sores or significant discomfort, consult your

pediatrician. They can provide stronger prescription treatments or investigate underlying causes.

If your baby is starting solid foods, introduce new foods gradually. Certain foods can cause changes in stool acidity, leading to diaper rash. Monitor for any reactions and adjust the diet accordingly.

If you use cloth diapers, wash them with mild, fragrance-free detergent and rinse thoroughly to remove any detergent residue. Avoid fabric softeners and dryer sheets, which can irritate the skin.



# Games and Activities

From the moment they are born, infants are absorbing and learning from the world around them.

Engaging in early learning activities encourages their cognitive, physical and emotional development. Parents and caregivers can foster this growth through a variety of stimulating games and activities tailored to their baby's developmental stage.

## SENSORY PLAY

Tummy time helps strengthen your baby's neck, shoulders and arms while also preventing flat spots on the back of the head. Place your baby on their tummy for a few minutes several times a day, gradually increasing the duration as they grow stronger. Use colorful toys or mirrors to keep them engaged and encourage lifting their head.

Create simple sensory bins with different textures and materials such as soft fabrics, safe plastic toys or even edible items like cooked pasta. Allow your baby to explore these with their hands and feet to enhance their sensory development.

Introduce your baby to a variety of sounds using rattles, musical toys or even household items like keys and wooden spoons. The different sounds can help develop auditory skills and curiosity.

## VISUAL STIMULATION

Newborns see high-contrast colors best. Show them black and white images or books to capture their attention and stimulate their vision. Hanging a colorful mobile above the crib or using a light projector that casts moving images can captivate your baby's attention and improve visual tracking skills.



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## MOTOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Provide your baby with a variety of toys that are easy to grasp, like soft blocks, rings and rattles. This helps improve their hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills. Place toys just out of your baby's reach to encourage them to reach, roll or crawl towards them. This promotes physical development and problem-solving skills.

## COGNITIVE AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

Peek-a-boo is a classic game that is fun and helps babies understand object permanence — the concept that objects continue to exist even when they cannot be seen. Cover your face with your hands or a blanket and then reveal it with a cheerful "Peek-a-boo!" to delight

your baby.

Reading to your baby from birth is incredibly beneficial. Choose books with bright pictures and simple, repetitive text. Point to the pictures and talk about them to enhance language development and build listening skills.

Singing nursery rhymes and songs with repetitive patterns can help develop your baby's language and memory skills. Clapping or moving in rhythm with the songs adds a physical component to the learning.

## SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Engage in face-to-face play and talk to your baby often. Mimic their sounds and expressions to encourage social interaction and emotional bonding.

Allow your baby to look at themselves in a baby-safe mirror. This activity can be both fascinating and fun, helping them become aware of their own facial expressions and movements.

## OUTDOOR EXPLORATION

Take your baby for walks in a stroller or baby carrier. The sights, sounds and smells of nature provide rich sensory experiences. Point out trees, birds and other natural elements, describing them as you go.

Visiting playgrounds and parks, even if just to sit and watch older children play, can be stimulating for infants. The change of environment and the activity around them can provide plenty of visual and auditory stimulation.

# Baby's First Toothbrush

The arrival of a baby's first tooth is a significant milestone, marking the beginning of their dental health journey.

Proper care for your baby's emerging teeth prevents early childhood cavities and sets the stage for a lifetime of healthy smiles.

Dental care should begin even before the first tooth emerges. Wipe your baby's gums with a clean, damp cloth after feedings to remove bacteria and food particles. Once the first tooth appears, usually around six months of age, it's time to start brushing. Early brushing helps remove plaque and prevents tooth decay, ensuring healthy development of baby teeth.

## TOOTHBRUSHES AND TOOTHPASTE

Select a toothbrush designed specifically for infants. These brushes typically have soft bristles and a small head to fit comfortably in a baby's mouth. The handle should be easy for you to hold and maneuver. Many baby toothbrushes feature bright colors and fun designs to make brushing more appealing to your little one.

Initially, use a tiny smear of fluoride toothpaste, about the size of a grain of rice. Fluoride strengthens tooth enamel and prevents cavities, but too much can be harmful if swallowed. As your child grows and learns to spit, you can gradually increase the amount to a pea-sized dab around age three. Always supervise brushing to ensure your child doesn't swallow toothpaste.

## BRUSHING TIPS

Position your baby in a comfortable spot, such as sitting on your lap or in a



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high chair. Gently brush all surfaces of the teeth and gums using small, circular motions. Pay special attention to the gumline and the back teeth, where plaque tends to accumulate. Brush twice a day, ideally after breakfast and before bedtime, to maintain optimal oral hygiene.

Consistency builds good dental habits. Make brushing a regular part of your baby's daily routine. Singing songs or telling stories can make the process more enjoyable and engaging. Over time, your baby will come to expect and even look forward to brushing time.

## FIRST DENTAL VISIT

Schedule your baby's first dental visit by their first birthday or within six months of the first tooth emerging. Early visits allow the dentist to check for any potential issues and provide guidance on proper oral care. Regular dental check-ups every six months will help monitor your child's dental development and prevent problems before they arise.

## ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR HEALTHY TEETH

Reduce your baby's risk of cavities by limiting sugary snacks and beverages.

Offer water between meals and save juice for special occasions.

Putting your baby to bed with a bottle of milk or juice can lead to tooth decay. If a bedtime bottle is necessary, fill it with water instead.

Sore gums can be soothed with a clean teething ring or a cold washcloth. Avoid teething biscuits or gels containing benzocaine.

Caring for baby's first teeth promotes lifelong dental health. By starting early and establishing good oral hygiene habits, you can help ensure that your child grows up with a healthy, happy smile.



# Coping with Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety is a common developmental stage that many babies and toddlers experience.

It usually begins around six to eight months of age and can last until they are about two years old. During this time, babies become more aware of their surroundings and start to understand that their parents can leave them, which can be distressing.

This anxiety stems from their developing awareness of object permanence — the understanding that people and objects continue to exist even when not visible. While this cognitive leap is an essential milestone, it also means babies can feel insecure and fearful when their parents are not around.

## SAFE AND PREDICTABLE ENVIRONMENT

Ease separation anxiety by creating a safe, predictable environment for your baby. Establishing a consistent daily routine helps your baby know what to expect, which can provide a sense of security. Regular meal times, nap times and playtimes create a structure that can comfort your baby even when you are not immediately present.

Additionally, familiarizing your baby with their surroundings can help. Spend time in the spaces where they will be when you are away,



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whether it's at home with another caregiver, at daycare or with family members. The more comfortable they feel in these environments, the less anxious they will be about your absence.

## SEPARATION PRACTICE

Gradually introducing short separations can help your baby get used to being away from you. Start by leaving your baby with a trusted

caregiver for brief periods while you are still at home. Gradually increase the duration of these separations as your baby becomes more comfortable. This approach helps your baby learn that you will always return, building their confidence and reducing anxiety.

Establishing a consistent goodbye ritual can provide reassurance to your baby. This ritual can be a specific phrase,

a hug, a kiss or a wave at the door. Keep the goodbye brief and upbeat, as prolonged or emotional farewells can increase your baby's distress. By consistently using the same ritual, your baby will learn to associate it with your departure and eventual return, providing them with a sense of predictability and security.

Comfort objects, such as a favorite blanket, stuffed

animal or even a piece of your clothing, can provide a sense of security when you are not around. These objects can help soothe your baby and provide a tangible reminder of you. Ensure that the comfort object is readily available during times of separation, whether at daycare or with a caregiver.

Babies are highly attuned to their parents' emotions. If you appear anxious or upset when leaving, your baby is likely to pick up on these cues and feel more anxious themselves. Stay calm and positive during separations, reassuring your baby that you will return soon. Your confidence can help your baby feel more secure.

Encouraging your baby to play independently for short periods can help them build confidence in their ability to be without you. Provide safe, engaging toys and allow your baby to explore and play on their own. Gradually increasing the time they spend playing independently can help them become more comfortable with short separations.

If your baby's separation anxiety seems particularly intense or persistent, seek support. Pediatricians, child psychologists and early childhood educators can offer guidance and strategies tailored to your baby's specific needs. Sometimes, understanding that this phase is temporary and part of normal development can provide reassurance to both you and your baby.

# Understanding Colic

For many new parents, the joy of bringing home a newborn can be overshadowed by the stress and confusion of dealing with a colicky baby.

Colic, characterized by prolonged periods of crying in an otherwise healthy infant, typically occurs between three weeks and three months old.

Colic is defined by the “Rule of Threes:” crying for more than three hours a day, for more than three days a week, for more than three weeks. The crying usually occurs in the late afternoon or evening and can be intense and inconsolable. Babies with colic often clench their fists, arch their backs and have difficulty being comforted.

According to the American Pregnancy Association, colic occurs in 20% to 25% of all babies and ends for 50% of babies by three months old. It can be caused by a sensitive temperament, an immature nervous system, high sensitivity to stimulation, food in the mother’s diet for breastfed babies, certain proteins in the formulas of bottle-fed babies, overfeeding or too quickly feeding, a mother smoking during pregnancy, intestinal gas, a low birth weight, hunger or acid reflux.

## TECHNIQUES FOR SOOTHING

**Swaddling:** Wrapping your



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baby snugly in a blanket can provide a sense of security and comfort. Swaddling mimics the womb environment, which can help calm a fussy baby.

**White noise:** Background noise that mimics the sounds

a baby heard in the womb can be soothing. A white noise machine, a vacuum cleaner or even a running fan can help drown out other noises and calm a colicky infant.

**Gentle motion:** Rocking, swinging or gentle bouncing

can have a soothing effect. Try holding your baby and swaying back and forth, or use a baby swing to provide rhythmic motion.

**Warm baths:** A warm bath can relax and soothe baby. The warmth and sensation of the

water can help ease discomfort and reduce crying spells.

### Feeding adjustments:

Sometimes colic can be related to feeding issues. Ensure your baby is not swallowing air during feedings, which can cause gas and discomfort. If you are breastfeeding, consider eliminating potential allergens from your diet. For formula-fed babies, a different formula might be worth trying after consulting with your pediatrician.

**Tummy time:** Gentle pressure on the baby’s tummy can help relieve gas. Lay your baby on your lap on their tummy and gently rub their back, or try the “colic hold” — placing the baby face down on your forearm with their head supported in your hand and their legs dangling on either side.

**Pacifiers:** Sucking can be a great way for babies to self-soothe. Offering a pacifier may help calm your baby and reduce crying.

## CARING FOR BABY AND YOU

If you suspect your baby has colic, consult with a pediatrician to rule out other potential causes of excessive crying, such as allergies, reflux or infections. Your doctor can provide additional strategies and reassurance.

Caring for a colicky baby can be exhausting and emotionally draining. Take care of yourself during this challenging time. Accept help from friends and family, take breaks when you can and remember that colic is temporary.



# Baby's First Doctor Visit

Your baby's first visit to the pediatrician is a significant milestone. It's an opportunity to ensure your newborn is healthy and to establish a foundation for their medical care.

Summit Health recommends a newborn's first visit take place within two to three days of being released from the hospital after birth. They recommend leaving home 15 minutes earlier than you think you will need because babies can do unexpected things.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

During the first visit, the pediatrician will conduct a comprehensive physical examination. This includes measuring your baby's weight, length, and head circumference to track growth. The doctor will check vital signs, examine the baby's skin, eyes, ears, mouth and reflexes, and listen to the heart and lungs.

Newborns often undergo screening tests to detect any potential health issues. These tests might include blood tests, hearing tests and a check for jaundice. The pediatrician will explain the purpose of each test and discuss any necessary follow-up.

The doctor will assess your baby's developmental milestones, such as reflexes and responses to stimuli. This helps ensure your baby is



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developing typically and provides an opportunity to address any concerns early on.

Depending on your baby's age, the first visit may include vaccinations. The pediatrician will inform you about the recommended immunization schedule and answer any questions you have about the vaccines.

Expect a lot of guidance on baby care, especially if this is your first child or it has been awhile since you've had one. The pediatrician will discuss feeding, sleep patterns and common newborn behaviors.

They will provide advice on safety, such as safe sleeping practices and car seat safety.

## HOW TO PREPARE

If your baby was born in a hospital or birthing center, bring any medical records provided at discharge. This includes the newborn screening results and any information about birth complications or treatments received.

Prepare a list of questions or concerns you have about your baby's health and care. No question is too small—your

pediatrician is there to help you feel confident in your parenting journey.

Be ready to discuss your baby's feeding patterns, whether you're breastfeeding, formula feeding, or a combination of both. Note how often your baby eats and any feeding issues you've encountered.

Track the number of wet and dirty diapers your baby produces daily. This information helps the pediatrician assess your baby's hydration and digestive health.

Dress your baby in easily removable clothing, as they

will need to be undressed for the physical examination. Bringing an extra outfit and blanket is also a good idea.

If possible, bring a support person with you. Another set of hands can be helpful, and they can assist in remembering the information provided by the pediatrician.

The first doctor visit is a vital step in ensuring your baby's health and well-being. By knowing what to expect and preparing accordingly, you can make the experience as smooth and stress-free as possible.