

Bathing a newborn can be a daunting (and slippery) task. However, with a little preparation and patience, the job can be smooth sailing!

Newborns do not enjoy being naked. They are sensitive to cold, and feel insecure outside of their clothing and blanket cocoon. Don't panic when your baby cries during bath time. Stay calm, take a deep breath, and work quickly and efficiently to clean your baby. If possible, have an extra set of adult hands available to help out.

Plan ahead for your newborn's bath. Gather everything you need and have supplies within arm's reach. Don't schedule the bath immediately following a feeding. The extra movement can bring that feeding right back up. Bathing a baby between feedings works best. In general, newborns are exhausted after their bath. Good news! Your newborn might take a nap following their bath. You may need one as well.

Here are some simple and practical steps to insure an efficient and successful bath time:

1. Choose a warm, quiet place for bathing a newborn. The huge tub in your bathroom makes bathing a newborn awkward. There are many types of infant tubs available. For the first few months, a bath sponge or a soft towel under your baby in the infant tub will be more comfortable for the newborn, and keep them from slipping.
2. Only a few inches of warm water is needed. Test the water temperature with your elbow. (Yes, that really IS the best way to check the water temperature.) Be extremely cautious that the water will not be too hot. A small cup or pitcher can be used to gently rinse the baby. Having a pitcher of fresh water comes in handy when (not if), your baby pees in the tub. Try and keep water from entering the infant's ear canal.
3. A small, soft washcloth works best for a tiny newborn. Using a damp washcloth, gently clean the baby's face, ears, and neck. Next, use a small amount of baby bath soap and gently wash and rinse the baby's scalp. Wash and rinse the baby's body, saving the diaper area for last. Make sure you get all those creases! Try and keep the umbilical cord area dry. Clean the umbilical cord area according to your pediatrician's instructions.
4. Your newborn is now as slippery as a seal! Hooded infant towels are a wonderful invention, but any soft towel will suffice. Warm up that baby as quickly as possible. A knit infant cap will help the newborn retain body heat. Baby lotion isn't a necessity, but it sure smells terrific! Diaper and dress your newborn quickly. Swaddling your newborn following their bath will help warm and soothe them.

Whew! It's over! That cold, wet, slippery newborn is now cozy, sweet smelling, and (hopefully) sleepy. Both you and your baby deserve a snack and a long nap. Each bath will get easier for both parents and baby. As the baby grows and becomes more responsive, bath time will become a fun and camera worthy experience.

Susan Huebner, Nurturing Newborns

Susan Huebner is a newborn specialist and owner of Nurturing Newborns, a service that provides help and education in caring for newborns.