Feeding and care

It is now advised that babies are fed ‘on demand’. That is to say when they show that they are hungry. There is no limit to how frequently you can feed, but for small babies, if a long interval passes, say five hours and the baby is still not hungry, it is advisable to wake your baby and offer a feed. Although it is very disturbing for parents to be woken during the night babies cannot store food as adults can and therefore need constant refuelling. Try to have a rest during the day. If you have any problems regarding feeding seek help from your midwife or health visitor.

Illness

Your baby may often have minor illnesses but if you are concerned in any way, seek advice from your midwife, health visitor or doctor - they will be glad to help.

It is important to recognise that a serious illness may be present if your baby:

- has a highpitched or weak cry, is less responsive or much less active
- looks very pale all over, grunsses with each breath, or has obvious dugs in the upper tummy or between the ribs when breathing
- takes less than a third of usual fluids or passes much less urine than usual, or vomiting green fluid, or passes large amounts of blood in the motions
- has a fever with sweating

Phone your doctor straight away. Do not wait. If your baby does not improve, take your baby to the nearest hospital with a children’s unit.

Never Shake a Baby

In moments of stress, perhaps if baby is crying a lot, some parents may lose control and shake their baby without realising the danger of it. Even if your baby seems ill, or appears to stop breathing, DO NOT SHAKE YOUR BABY as this can cause more damage. If it seems your baby has stopped breathing try flicking the soles of your baby’s feet. It is important when you pick up your baby to support his/her neck. If you ever lose control and shake a baby get medical help immediately, preferably at your local hospital. Because babies are fragile, their neck muscles are not very strong and therefore shaking can make baby’s head move back and forth very quickly which can lead to serious problems such as blindness, deafness, brain damage or even death.

Baby’s growth and weight

Babies who are fit and well, after an initial weight loss, normally put on weight steadily, 4 to 7oz a week (122 to 198gms). All babies have a weight and height chart called a ‘centile chart’ in parent-held records. The midwife or health visitor will monitor this when visiting you or seeing you at a clinic. This will show if your baby is gaining weight satisfactorily and she will advise you if there are any problems. Also when you go to the clinic you can meet other mothers and babies.

Smoking

Babies who are exposed to tobacco smoke in the air they breathe are also at increased risk of cot death and illness. Avoid smoking in the house and ask visitors not to smoke. When you go out try not to take your baby into smoky places.

Guidelines for Parents

Caring for Young babies
**Temperature**

Babies are unable to control their temperature and can rapidly overheat. Research has shown the best temperature for a baby to be between 16°C and 20°C (60°F - 70°F). It is a good idea to buy a maximum and minimum thermometer, available from garden centres, or obtain a wall temperature card - your health visitor or community midwife will be able to advise you.

**Overheating and Clothing**

Now that many homes are insulated and often have central heating and/or double glazing, the inside temperature does not vary much winter to summer so babies do not need to be dressed very differently when indoors in either season.

Babies should never sleep with a hot water bottle or electric blanket. Equally, do not put babies to sleep next to a radiator or fire or in direct warm sunshine.

Babies can be overheated because of too much clothing or bedding - the TOG Table is a guide only. If a baby is sweating, feels hot, take some bedding off. A nappy, vest and babygro are all the clothing needed. To tell if your baby is too hot or cold, feel the back of their neck or tummy under the bed clothes.

**TOG Rating**

A TOG is a measurement of the heat retaining properties of clothing and bedding. Research has shown the ideal TOG rating of a baby's clothes and coverings is about 0 - 10 tog when indoors. It is important to remember that if a blanket is doubled the TOG rating will also be doubled.

**Extremes in temperature**

In cold weather you need to keep the room where the baby sleeps at between 16°C and 20°C (60°F - 70°F) by night and day.

Wrap baby up sufficiently when going outdoors, particularly from birth to four weeks old.

In hot weather protect your baby from the sun with a shade and a sun hat. Babies' skin burns easily so always use a sun cream or lotion, even in sun which does not affect your own skin.

In shops - once inside a shop or shopping centre remove plastic covers, blankets, hat and mittens. If you feel hot, imagine how your baby feels!

In cars - remember that babies can easily get overheated in a car and it is not advisable to put them in their outdoor clothes until they are out in their pram.

Returning home - do not leave your baby to sleep in outdoor clothes when you return home as overheating can occur. An overheated baby may become very red faced, start to sweat and become fretful but some babies will often sleep for long periods continuing to get hotter and hotter. Babies lose heat from their heads so keep hats on outdoors, if necessary, but remove them indoors.

**Bedtime**

When you go to bed check the temperature and add an extra blanket if necessary. Duvets, quilts and cot bumpers are not recommended for babies under one year old.

Babies control their temperature by losing heat through their head. So unless it is cold, take off hats or other head covering to allow air to circulate and prevent overheating.

Baby nests and sheepskins are such good insulators that they too carry a risk of overheating, so we do not recommend their use.

Wrapping tightly (swaddling) increases the TOG rating by 3 times. If you do this, a sheet should be used rather than a blanket.

At bedtime it is probably best to have a baby dressed as follows:

- Vest * Nappy * Babygro * Shuts * 2 blankets

**Sleeping position**

Recent research has shown that it is advisable to place babies on their backs, rather than letting them lie on their tummies. Your health visitor or midwife will advise you if your baby will not settle in this position. For some medical conditions babies may need to be laid on their tummies.

It is recommended that babies should be put in the 'feet to foot' position in the cot, and the bedding made up so that the baby cannot wriggle down beneath it and get too hot.