

BABY'S FIRST FOUR MONTHS

A new baby is a magnet for relatives, friends and neighbors, and this appeals to the new parents' pride. However, too many visitors or visits that last too long can be tiring for both baby and parents. You should make sure that visits are short, for your own good, and the baby doesn't get handled, passed around and talked at a lot, for his good.

A few days or a few weeks after your baby is born, you may feel depressed. Perhaps you feel that you can't cope with all your new duties, that you're not doing enough for your baby or that your husband doesn't show enough interest. Don't worry about these blues. It's a normal reaction to having a baby and the changes that take place then. Get out to a beauty parlor, dinner with your husband or have a good friend in for a visit. You need a change of pace. When you go out, don't fret about your baby as long as he's in capable, loving hands. He'll be well looked after and will begin to become accustomed to others.

Your doctor will give you the baby's formula. It's most important that you prepare it so that it is sterile, as germs grow readily in milk. There are two basic methods of formula preparation. In the aseptic method, you sterilize the bottles, nipples, caps and other equipment. Then prepare the formula according to your doctor's instructions and add it to the bottles. It's easiest to sterilize the nipples and caps in a pan. Boil them for three minutes. Put all the equipment in the sterilizer. Add about an inch of water and boil for five minutes. Meanwhile, you can sterilize the formula. Keep it simmering for 5 minutes. Stir constantly so that it won't burn on the bottom or boil over. Use the tongs to handle the bottles and handle the nipples and caps by their edges only. Don't forget to burp baby halfway through his feeding. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap before starting any formula preparation.

In the terminal method, you sterilize everything together once the formula is in the bottles. Wash the bottles thoroughly and rinse well. Wash and rinse the nipples and caps. If the nipples are clogged, clean up the holes with a toothpick. Fill each bottle with the amount recommended by your doctor. Put the nipple on upside down then the disk, and screw on the cap. Now is the time to sterilize some drinking water, if your baby takes it. If you work methodically and plan a certain time in your day for formula preparation, it need not be a chore. Make sure that the caps are not on tight so that the hot air can escape. Put a couple of inches of hot water in the sterilizer and let it boil for a full fifteen minutes. There will be less formula scum to clog the nipple holes if you turn off the heat and let the bottles cool slowly in the sterilizer.

The normal flow is about this speed. Your baby may need an increased rate. Enlarge the hole with a fine needle which has been heated red hot. A baby who is a strong sucker may need a fine hole.

Cool the bottles quickly. Screw the caps down and place them in the refrigerator.

Playtime is a good time for baby to get to know his dad. Neither parent need go overboard to entertain him but he does like your presence and the sound of your voices. He likes to be handled but not too much. In the first few months, he's acquiring all kinds of impressions of you. From early days, the baby will be exercising himself. He'll toss his arms, clench his fists and move his legs around. You'll notice that his movements aren't coordinated yet but each day, they are getting stronger.

He can't see things as we do. An object directly in his line of sight will catch his attention, but if you move it sideways, his eyes won't follow it. As he can't focus his eyes properly yet, the object is indistinct. Because his experience is so limited and he hasn't the strength, he won't try to reach for or grasp anything that is held out to him. He can't lift his head yet.

You have to handle your baby many times during the day. There are certain things to keep in mind. When changing or bathing him, never leave him alone for an instant. When you lift him, always support his head.

When turning him on his tummy, support his head this way, and when you turn him back, give him the proper support. Carry him with support under the buttocks and back and the head. Your baby should get outdoors for a while each day. Fresh air is good for him. Use a flat mattress with no pillow in the carriage and use covers suitable for the temperature. Don't overdress him. Make sure that the covers are tucked into the mattress so that they can't work loose. In cold weather, protect him from the wind.

As he grows older, he'll need company. Remember that the attention he gets at the right time is so important to him. Sometimes you have to hold or carry your baby while preparing something for him and he'll like it. While he doesn't know what's going on, he's getting that feeling of loving care and companionship that he can get only from you. You can carry him like this, giving him good support, yet still have one arm free. As time passes, he'll become familiar with the various fascinating places in your home, cupboards and shelves and shiny refrigerators. He'll hear the wonderful noises that pots and pans make. He'll be starting to participate in your household life.

Establish a regularity in your baby's eating, sleeping and playing habits. After his feeding, burp him and hold him quietly for a few minutes. Put him to bed right after his feeding. Make sure that he gets fresh air but no drafts, that the temperature is comfortable. Never waken him to show him off to visitors, but don't worry about normal household noises, it won't bother him. He'll sleep as long as he needs to. Darken the room and off he'll go to the land of nod.

Your babysitter must not only be sensible and competent; she must be familiar to your baby. Perhaps she can put him to bed. This lets your baby get used to the sitter, lets you watch the sitter in action and assure yourself that you have a person who understands children. It's wise to have a permanent list for the sitter, a phone number where you can be reached, your doctor's number and a neighbor's number, any special information about baby's habits or needs. Show her where diapers and clothes are kept, where the formula is and food for the sitter. Don't forget to show her the location of the thermostat and telephone.

Short trips or a weekend away from home make a welcome change for you and your husband. Take baby along with you and get rid of that housebound feeling. A car cooler is useful for keeping formula in or you can make up fresh formula as long as you follow the sterile methods which you use at home. Disposable diapers, paper bibs and paper handkerchiefs solve many laundry problems. Use a separate case for baby's things. Take along a plastic bag for soiled clothes. Be sure to include his favorite playthings so that he will feel at home. An auto bed is ideal for this small baby. You can move him around easily without disturbing him. Now relax and enjoy your family trip.

By three to four months, your baby's actions will be much stronger, more varied and much more coordinated. He takes a lot more interest in the world around him. He'll smile at you because he knows you so well by now. He can look in all directions. He knows you by sight. He'll blow bubbles, he'll laugh because he likes to have loving people around him. The feelings of affection, security and consistency that you show him now will stay with him all his life. His hands are never still. If you put a rattle in his hand, he'll hold on to it and play with it. Everything he grasps, he'll try to put in his mouth, so make sure that all his toys are too big to swallow and keep them clean. His muscles are developing at a tremendous rate. He can arch his back and raise his head. Continue to give him good support, and when he's sitting, he can hold his head up. He's getting to know more people and as long as they show understanding, patience and love, he'll be happy.

Your doctor will advise you regarding of the baby's need for vitamins C and B or orange juice may be advised as the source of vitamin C. Whether you have a doctor or attend a well-baby clinic, information is only as far away as the telephone, or make a note of any questions to ask on your next visit. Your doctor will advise you when to start your baby on solid foods. These may be precooked cereal, prepared fruits and vegetables or strained meats. Follow your doctor's recommendations.

Your baby needs to be loved and knows when you're enjoying the time you spend with him. He wants to be talked to and petted. Make a time each day for this and make sure too that anytime you're with him, you show him your fondness. His father should have some playtime with him also, perhaps at bath time or feeding time. This makes a true family.

Getting solid food is another milestone in your baby's progress. It will add the extra vitamins, iron and bulk which he's beginning to acquire. The perfect combination: good food, a healthy, happy baby and a happy, loving mother.

Transcript: Chloé Bourgogne