

Choices for your baby's care begin immediately at birth. The best preparation is to have considered them and decided beforehand what procedures you desire for your newborn. For a hospital birth, there are numerous routine procedures which can be administered, delayed or even refused.

Many parents don't realize the impact that these procedures can have on their newborn child. Once you have decided what procedures you prefer and whether you want them performed immediately or on a delayed schedule, the best way to communicate them to staff/caregivers is to include a Newborn Baby Care section in your birth plan. This will ensure that your preferences are on paper before the birth and remove any doubt as to your wishes for your new child after birth.

You may refuse any and all of these procedures. This is your baby and you get to decide what is done to it. Another critical point to remember is that you can, and absolutely have the right to, receive information about each and every procedure, as well as the right to either request the procedure be performed in your room or that a parent/guardian accompany the newborn for each one. This includes weighing, measuring and the pediatrician's evaluation of the baby - all can be performed right there in the mother's room. Remember, your first responsibility is to the welfare of your child.

The most commonly performed routine newborn baby care procedures to consider are:

Suctioning

For most hospitals, it is routine procedure to suction the baby's mouth and nose as soon as the head emerges on the perineum. Either a deep suction hose will be used or a bulb syringe to extract any mucus or meconium that may be present.

While it may seem a good idea to suction as soon as possible, the reality is that the baby is not at great risk at this point since it will not take its first breath until the cord stops pulsating or is cut. And babies are well able to remove fluids on their own, as this is a natural part of the birth process. Suctioning can be delayed until after the baby has been born. Better yet, suctioning can only be performed when indicated rather than a routine procedure for those infants who do not need it.

Cord Clamping

The next and perhaps most critical newborn baby care decision to be made for your baby's welfare is cord clamping - immediate or delayed. The benefits of delayed cord clamping, which is defined as waiting until the cord has stopped pulsating until clamping or cutting it, are well-documented. As much as 1/3 of your baby's total blood volume may be in the placenta at the time of birth, and delayed clamping allows that blood to flow into your baby where it belongs.

Newborn Vitamin K Injection

All newborns are born with a low level of Vitamin K which is responsible for preventing hemorrhage by enhancing the blood's clotting ability. In a small percentage of newborns, cerebral hemorrhage can occur which spurred the universal practice of newborn vitamin K injections in the United States.

PKU Screening

Certain metabolic disorders, including a PKU test, are routinely screened for at birth through a heel stick blood sample. These disorders have devastating effects that are best handled with early detection and treatment to ensure the best possible outcomes. This is the least controversial newborn baby care procedure since the benefits do outweigh the risks.

Hep B Vaccine

The Hep B Vaccine, for a disease that is transmitted via infected blood and sexual intercourse, is given at birth in the hope of catching as many people as possible. It may be given at any time in childhood or adulthood. In low-risk families, it may be advisable to delay the administration to the weeks after birth, rather than injecting a minutes-old baby, causing pain as one of its first experiences outside the womb.

Antibiotic Eye Ointment

To prevent the chance of blindness due to gonorrhea from an infected mother, hospital-born babies are given antibiotic drops or erythromycin ointment in their eyes, even if the mother previously screened negative for this in her pregnancy. The disadvantage to this procedure is that this we really want to reduce the unnecessary use of antibiotics in order to prevent resistant strains from developing. This is the same reason many pediatricians are no longer treating ear infections with antibiotics. Some people are concerned that blurred vision caused by the ointment may interfere with bonding, but the ointment is not usually administered until an hour or two after the parents have had a initial bonding period. You may want to discuss the antibiotic options with the nursery staff.

To Bathe or Not to Bathe

If there is one newborn baby care procedure that many families never consider, it's bathing a newborn. However, this may indeed be something a new family decides to decline. The vernix which coats the baby's extremely sensitive skin is the best natural moisturizer available and will protect it from infection when massaged into the skin. Additionally, a bath can cause a baby's body temperature to drop, thus necessitating further interventions to regulate it.

Circumcision

Circumcision is a huge decision that deserves your deep thought and consideration. No Check out the latest info from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), the [American Medical Association](#), and [the CDC](#).

"Existing scientific evidence demonstrates potential medical benefits of newborn male circumcision; however, these data are not sufficient to recommend routine neonatal circumcision. In circumstances in which there are potential benefits and risks, yet the procedure is not essential to the child's current well-being, parents should determine what is in the best interest of the child."

If you choose to circumcise, consider the option of circumcision by a Mohel. The Jewish circumcision ceremony can be less stressful than a hospital circumcision, and is done on the eighth day of life after baby's clotting factors have matured. If you are certain you want your son circumcised by a doctor; in the hospital, before you are discharged, is the only time it can be done without general anesthesia.

Hearing Test

Before you are discharged your baby's hearing will be checked. Usually it is done by measuring otoacoustic emissions. For this test, a miniature earphone and microphone are placed in the ear, sounds are played and a response is measured. If a baby hears normally, an echo is reflected back into the ear canal and is measured by the microphone. When a baby has a hearing loss, no echo can be measured on the OAE test.

Carefully consider your newborn baby care options. If at any time you have questions about a procedure for your newborn, don't hesitate to ask questions. You are your child's first and foremost advocate - be the voice they lack as you choose what interventions are in their best interest.

