



Common Problems in Newborn Babies

Looking after a newborn baby is a wonderful experience that has to be enjoyed and cherished. Many parents, however, are often troubled by doubts, worries and concerns that this period becomes a stressful time. They are at a loss as to how to handle the newborn, and they may find themselves confused by conflicting advice from well-meaning relatives and friends. Such a scenario may lead to postnatal blues in some mothers. To allay your doubts and fears, **Dr I. Malathi, Paediatrician from Parkway East Hospital** addresses some common problems in newborn babies.

I want to breastfeed my baby. But how do I breastfeed successfully and how will I know if my baby is getting enough milk?

As more mothers are aware of the benefits of breastfeeding, this is a common worry. Breastfeeding is a natural process, and to succeed in this, you need to mentally prepare yourself that you want to feed the infant, and you can feed him. Initiate feeding early, as soon as the baby is born, and allow him to suckle frequently, on demand. The first few days after birth are important. Do not introduce the bottle if at all possible as this will cause nipple confusion, and the baby may reject the breast. There will be some soreness of the nipple initially, but persist, and it will improve later. Feeding intervals may be erratic in the first few days, with baby falling asleep as soon as he is put to the breast. You will know if your baby has sufficient milk if he is contented after a feed, is passing urine at least five to six times in 24 hours, is passing frequent loose yellow stools, and is gaining weight. It is important that you relax, be calm and have a positive approach to feeding.

Why does my baby have a cold? Why is the breathing so noisy?

Sneezing and noisy breathing is a common problem in young infants. Most infants sneeze to clear nasal secretions, not because they have a cold. The nasal passages are small in newborn babies so as they learn to breathe through their nose, they make a kind of snuffling noise. Most children outgrow this problem by the time they are two to three months. As long as the baby is able to feed well, and the sleep is not disturbed, no treatment is required. If the nasal congestion affects the feeding, then some nasal drops may be required temporarily. It is not advisable to give cough and cold medicine to young infants, as these medications may depress the breathing of such infants.

Why does my baby keep vomiting?

Vomiting in young infants may be due to several reasons. The baby may have swallowed too much wind during feeding time, and may not have burped. Overfeeding may cause vomiting in some babies. The technique of feeding is also important - if your baby is

bottle-fed, ensure that the milk flow is not too fast or too slow, and burp him midway during feeds. Many babies regurgitate or posset their feeds. In such infants, the vomiting is not projectile, but rather, flows out slowly after the feed. The child appears well and does not cry. Reflux, as this condition is known, is due to a lax valve in the junction between the gullet and stomach, and this improves as the child grows older. No treatment is required as long as the baby is gaining weight adequately. In some instances, a thickened formula may be prescribed to reduce reflux. If the vomiting is projectile or forceful, or if the baby is not gaining weight, his crying pattern changes suddenly or if he feels unwell in any way, it is important that medical advice is sought, as it may indicate an underlying medical or surgical condition.

Is my baby having diarrhoea?

Newborn babies have frequent, loose golden yellow stools in the first few weeks of life. Breast-fed babies, in particular, may pass eight to ten stools in a day, while formula-fed babies may pass about four to five times. The stool frequency may change after two months, with infrequent stools, once every four to five days, even up to one week. As long as the stools are soft, and the baby is happy, feeding well and there is no bloating of the abdomen, there should be no cause for concern and no treatment is needed. Although the stool colour is usually yellow in breast-fed infants, greenish stools are also common, especially if some formula feeds are also given.

Help! My baby keeps crying all the time!

Your baby is probably suffering from colic. Colic usually starts from the age of three weeks, and may last up to three months. It usually occurs in the evening, and the baby may be crying incessantly for hours. Attend to the infant's basic needs first - ensure he is fed, not wet or soiled, not too cold or warm. Seek medical help immediately if the child is febrile, lethargic, not feeding well or is vomiting, or if there is passage of blood in the stools. If the child is otherwise well, colic drops may be prescribed. Gripe water may be given if the baby is more than a month old. Swaddling the baby, gentle rocking action, carrying the baby on your shoulder with gentle pressure on the abdomen, or even taking the baby for a car ride, are some of the measures to soothe a colicky baby. This condition usually improves by three months or so.

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