

CORD CARE

What is an umbilical cord?

When a baby is still in its mother's womb, it receives nourishment and oxygen through the umbilical cord. After birth, the baby is able to begin breathing and eating on its own and no longer needs the umbilical cord. Shortly after birth, the umbilical cord will be clamped and cut. The piece that remains attached to the infant will be allowed to dry up and fall off on its own.

The umbilical cord generally falls off within 1-3 weeks but in some cases it could take longer. It is important not to force the umbilical cord to detach before it is ready. When the umbilical cord is ready to fall off, you will likely find it in your baby's diaper or clothing.

Keep your newborn's umbilical cord clean and dry. Some pediatricians recommend wiping the umbilical cord with rubbing alcohol after every diaper change but many are now recommending that parents simply leave the umbilical cord alone and allow it to heal. Alcohol can irritate sensitive newborn skin and does not necessarily promote faster healing. In fact, some studies are now showing that alcohol can delay the time it takes for the cord to fall off.

Fold the top of your newborn's diaper over. The diaper area is very humid and moist and not an ideal environment for your newborn's umbilical cord to be in. Simply fold the top of your newborn's diaper over to keep the umbilical cord on the outside. Some newborn diapers have an umbilical cord cut out. These umbilical cord cut outs are often not enough to keep the umbilical cord out of the diaper area so some folding of the diaper may still be necessary.

Avoid bathing your newborn until the umbilical cord falls off. Newborn babies do not need much bathing at first. Spit-up can be wiped clean with a damp cloth and a short sponge bath when necessary will keep your newborn clean.

Signs of Infection

In rare cases, your newborn's umbilical cord can become infected. If you notice any signs of infection it is important to contact your pediatrician immediately. Short episodes of bleeding can be caused by accidentally pulling on the umbilical cord and normal. Continuous bleeding that does not subside right away is not normal. Your newborn's umbilical cord should not have a foul smell to it or contain any pus around the area. Redness around the base of the umbilical cord could also be a sign of infection and should initiate a call to your pediatrician.