

Parents Practice Sheet

Swim – related bath time routine for babies under 4 months



If a baby is held lightly in water she/he will begin to feel her/his own buoyancy.

The family bath is the best way to introduce a new born to water in the comfort of home, at a time that suits you both.

Hot baths are too warm for babies. Ideally the temperature of the water should be between 30-32 degrees and the air temperature about 25-27 degrees.

When you first start bath practice, it is best to have the help of another adult as you may need practice handling a wet child.

The most important thing is that the activity should be fun. Make sure you have towels and whatever else you may need at hand, switch off the phone and relax. A little baby massage and baby yoga before getting into the bath will help.

Once in the bath, make sure the water level always covers at least half of your baby's body.

Sitting in the bath with your knees up, hold your baby close, facing you at first, and lay him/her on his/hers back against your legs. Talk to him and gently splash his tummy, letting him experience being in the water with you.

Once he is content, turn him/her around so that his back is against you and his/her head is on your chest. Place your hands gently under his head and let him float with his ears submerged. He/she may stretch and start moving his/hers legs in movements that remind you of when he/she was inside your womb. Some new borns smile,

move their heads and look relaxed.

Give your baby one or two minutes to unwind and feel the water. Babies' sense of touch is dominant and they will take time to register all the sensations of moving freely in the water.

When you have gained confidence, try and float your baby with one hand and gradually reduce the support you give to his/her head.

Some new borns nearly float; others go under if you lower your hand. Follow your instincts at this stage. When you try gradually removing your hand, watch your baby's reaction to having his face slightly under the water. If he/she cries, don't try again for a couple of days.

With patience and repetition, as your baby gets stronger week by week, he may float with just his/her nose and mouth above the surface.

Most babies' heads need some support until a stronger leg movement can contribute and help them stay afloat. At this stage, arm and leg movements are mostly reflex actions. Your baby may start kicking vigorously or just enjoy floating with very little movement. The extent of his/her reflex has no bearing on his future abilities in the water.

Do not get put off if your baby's first experience in the bath is not pure bliss. Many babies are not totally happy when introduced to water and some will cry. Cuddle your baby and try again later, checking all the variables in the environment carefully.

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Some babies need cradling in the water at first; having their arms held securely along their bodies will help them relax in the warmth of the water.

Change your baby's position in the bath from back to front and front to back in order to provide different sensations, perspectives, and to exercise different muscles. In both positions, gently sprinkle water on your baby's tummy or on his/her back. Most babies love the sensation of the water trickling down their skin.

Early submersions in the bath

If your baby shows every sign of enjoying the bath play, you get let the water flush your baby's face two or three times – allowing him/her to breathe in between. Stop this if he/she cries though.

Many babies enjoy this first sensation of having water on their face. Does your baby keep his/hers eyes open?

With your baby facing you as you sit in the bath, practise holding your baby with your hands on the sides of his/her rib cage, with your thumbs above his shoulders to signal to him/her.

After seeking consent and signalling action, draw him/her gently underwater towards you.

It is important not to hesitate at the start of this movement, be swift and immediately lift him/her up close to your chest for a cuddle.

If you are nervous, practise just holding your baby first. Be relaxed and calm with him/

her. If he/she cries, allow him/she to settle down and don't repeat the exercise. If he/she is happy, repeat it just once or twice in each bath session.

Wash your baby at the end of the bath, just before you are ready to get him/her out, reach for the towel to wrap him/her securely.

Babies appreciate a feed after their bath practice. Breast or bottle-feeding in the water can be very soothing and allow your baby to enjoy his bath a little longer. However the whole bath time should not exceed fifteen to twenty minutes.

This is an excellent preparation at home until you are ready to take your baby to the pool and join in classes. It helps your baby to discover the joy of buoyancy and submersion long before they have any fear of water.

This quality time with your new born in water can be the beginning of many years of shared water play and water sports and lifelong enjoyment of water together.

IMPORTANT

- Never leave a baby or young child alone in the bath under any circumstances and never ask an older sibling to look after a baby in the bath.
- Be careful with hot water taps while handling your baby in the bath. They may protrude and often remain unexpectedly hot.