

Nappy Rash

Nappy rash is skin irritation and inflammation caused by urine, faeces or other irritants in contact with skin in the nappy area. Frequent nappy changes and good skin care can help prevent nappy rash, but most babies get some nappy rash even when their nappies are changed often. A pharmacist can give advice about nappy rash.

Causes

A baby's skin can be irritated or damaged by contact with:

- faeces (bowel motions/stools/poo) – especially loose faeces caused by certain foods, medicines, infections or teething
- urine (wee) – especially when the nappy is left on too long or is covered by plastic pants. Plastic pants make nappy rash more likely by keeping the baby's skin warm, wet and airless
- irritating chemicals – detergents, soaps, bleach, water softeners, fabric softeners and nappy rinses left on cloth nappies can be irritating. Cloth nappies need to be rinsed well with clean water. Some nappy change creams and lotions, and some skin wipes can also irritate the skin



- friction – nappies with a rough surface (e.g. cloth nappies) can damage sensitive skin.

Babies who have very sensitive skin or suffer from a skin condition (e.g. eczema/dermatitis, psoriasis) are more likely to get nappy rash.

Signs and symptoms

- Simple nappy rash is a burn-like rash on the skin in the nappy area. The skin appears red, swollen, moist, shiny and slightly rough or scaly. Skin in the creases is usually less affected.
- Nappy rash can become infected with a fungus called candida (thrush). This usually causes a brighter red, shiny rash with sharply outlined edges. There are often small red or white spots around the edges of the rash. Candida nappy rash can affect the skin creases, buttocks, thighs, abdomen, anal area and genitals.
- Nappy rash can become infected with bacteria. This can cause weeping or yellow crusting of the rash area and a fever.

Nappy rash can be painful, especially when urine comes into contact with irritated skin. A baby with nappy rash can be very unsettled.

Treatment

A pharmacist can give advice about managing nappy rash and the products available to help treat and prevent it.

Simple nappy rash

Most cases of simple nappy rash clear up in 2–3 days with good skin care and frequent nappy changes.

- Check nappies often. Change nappies immediately after a bowel motion or at the first sign of wetness to reduce the time the skin is in contact with urine or faeces.

- Gently clean the baby's bottom at each nappy change with luke-warm water using a soft cloth or cotton wool. If this does not clean the skin well enough, use a non-drying, non-soap cleanser. Avoid soap, talcum powder and skin wipes as these may irritate the skin.
- Pat the skin dry (do not rub it) and leave it uncovered until completely dry.
- Gently put a layer of barrier cream or ointment on the skin at each nappy change, after cleaning the baby's bottom. This provides a water-resistant protective layer and helps soothe the baby's skin.
- Leave the nappy off as much as possible to expose the skin to the air. Take care if the baby is outdoors as a baby's skin is sensitive and burns very easily.
- While the baby has nappy rash, use disposable nappies if possible. They keep the skin drier, especially overnight. Choose a highly absorbent type.
- If using cloth nappies, do not use plastic over pants.
- Add a non-soap bath solution or oil to the baby's bath to help relieve skin irritation (e.g. oatmeal bath oil or a handful of oats in the foot of an old stocking).
- Give paracetamol for pain relief if the baby is unsettled.

More severe nappy rash

More severe nappy rash needs good skin care and frequent nappy changes, and may also need treatment with medicines. For example:

- Hydrocortisone cream or ointment can reduce the skin inflammation and may be needed for a few days.
- If the rash is infected with thrush an anti-fungal cream or ointment, which kills the fungus, may be needed.
- See a doctor if nappy rash does not clear with hydrocortisone and antifungal treatment, or if bacterial infection is suspected.

Prevention

- Check nappies frequently. Change nappies immediately after a bowel motion or at the first sign of wetness. (Check disposable nappies for wetness every 3–4 hours and cloth nappies for wetness every 2 hours).
- Gently clean the baby's bottom at each nappy change with lukewarm water using a soft cloth or cotton wool. Use a non-drying, non-soap cleanser if necessary. If using skin wipes, only use alcohol-free wipes that are made for babies.
- Pat the skin dry and leave it uncovered until completely dry.
- Put a layer of barrier cream or ointment on the skin at each nappy change, after cleaning the baby's bottom.
- Treat the skin in the nappy area gently.

Important

Products used on the skin in the nappy area (e.g. wipes, barrier creams) should be free of soap, alcohol, perfumes, preservatives, herbal ingredients, essential oils and other ingredients that are not necessary, as they may cause irritation or allergy. Talcum and other powders should also be avoided.

Seek medical advice if:

- rash spreads outside the nappy area
 - rash is no better after five days of treatment
 - skin is broken and rash is severe
 - rash shows signs of bacterial infection (e.g. pus, weeping, blisters, crusting)
 - baby also has a fever, is irritable, is not eating well or generally seems ill.
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- Leave the nappy off as much as possible to expose skin in the nappy area to air.
 - Try using highly absorbent disposable nappies, especially at night.
- If using cloth nappies:
- Rinse wet or dirty nappies before placing in nappy soaking solution. Use gloves or wash hands well after handling dirty nappies.
 - Wash nappies with pure soap or detergent for sensitive skin.
 - Rinse nappies well after washing, to remove soaps and other chemicals.
 - Use a one-way nappy liner next to the baby's skin.
 - Do not use plastic over pants.

For more information

The local Baby, Child or Infant Health Centre

Listed in the white pages of the phone book.

Raising Children Network

Website: www.raisingchildren.net.au

New Zealand Dermatological Society

Website: www.dermnetnz.org

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthdirect.org.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

NPS Medicine Wise

Medicines Information Line

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

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Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.*

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