

# Nappy Rash

**Nappy rash is skin irritation caused by urine, bowel motions or other irritants around the nappy area. Good nappy changing habits can limit nappy rash, but most babies get some nappy rash no matter how well they are cared for.**

## Causes

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

- Bowel motions (faeces/stools/poo) – especially loose motions 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 – in nappy change creams and skin wipes, or in cloth nappies which have not been rinsed completely clean. Detergents, soaps, bleach, water softeners, fabric softeners and nappy rinses can be irritating



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

Babies who have very sensitive skin or suffer from skin disorders (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 affected less.

- Nappy rash can become infected with a fungus called candida (thrush). This usually causes a brighter red, shiny rash with sharply outlined edges, often with smaller spots out of the main area. Candidal nappy rash can affect the creases, buttocks, thighs, abdomen, anal area and genitals and may be accompanied by oral thrush.
- Nappy rash can become infected with bacteria. This may cause weeping or yellow crusting of the rash area and a fever.

Nappy rash can be painful and 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.

- Check nappies often. Change wet or dirty nappies straight away, especially cloth nappies, to reduce the time the irritated skin is in contact with urine or bowel motions. If using cloth nappies, do not use plastic overpants.

- Gently clean the baby's bottom at each nappy change with plain warm water using a soft cloth or cotton wool. If this does not clean well enough, use a non-drying, non-soap cleanser. Avoid soap, talcum powder and 'skin wipes' as these may further irritate the skin.
- Pat skin dry (do not rub it) and leave uncovered until completely dry.
- Gently apply a water-repellant, soothing barrier cream or ointment, after cleaning the baby's bottom, at each nappy change. 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, as they keep the skin drier, especially overnight. Choose the most absorbent type.
- Non-soap bath solutions and oils can be added to the baby's bath to help settle 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

In addition to following the skin care and nappy changing practices for managing simple nappy rash:

- Hydrocortisone cream or ointment, which reduces inflammation, may be used for a short time to treat a severe rash
- If the rash is infected with a fungus (e.g., thrush) an anti-fungal cream or ointment may be needed
- Consult 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. (Test 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 plain lukewarm water using a soft cloth or cotton wool. Use a non-drying, non-soap cleanser when necessary. If using skin wipes, only use non-alcohol wipes that are made for babies.
- Pat skin dry and leave uncovered until completely dry.
- Avoid vigorous scrubbing of the nappy area as this may damage skin.
- Apply a protective barrier cream or ointment at each nappy change.
- Expose skin in the nappy area to air as much as possible by giving the baby frequent nappy free times.

## Important

Products used routinely on the nappy area (e.g., wipes, barrier creams) should be free of soap, alcohol, perfumes, preservatives, herbals, essential oils, aloe and other unnecessary ingredients that may cause irritation or allergy. Talcum and other powders should also be avoided.

Consult a doctor 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, crusts)
  - Baby also has a fever, is irritable, is not eating well or generally seems ill.
- If using cloth nappies:
- If possible, use highly absorbent disposable nappies, especially at night.
  - 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 and avoid plastic overpants.

## For more information

### **The local Baby, Child or Infant Health Centre**

Listed in the white pages of the phone book.

### **DermNet NZ**

Website: [www.dermnetnz.org](http://www.dermnetnz.org)

### **Healthdirect Australia**

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

### **Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)**

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

### **National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information**

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: [www.nps.org.au](http://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.*

## Related fact cards

- » *Eczema and Dermatitis*
- » *Sense in the Sun (website only – ask your pharmacist)*
- » *Thrush*

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