17 secrets to baby care

BY LIZ KOZAK

The car seat is locked and loaded. You’ve packed up all your supplies from the hospital, including that big stack of disposable panties. (And just wait until you find out what a petri-dish for hut!) That adorable “going home” outfit fits your new baby perfectly.

Now what?

If you’re in need of some Basic Baby Training, we’ve enlisted the experts to help you out: NICU (Neonatal Intensive Care Unit) nurses specialize in caring for the most delicate newborns. Here are 17 of their best-kept baby care secrets.

Feeding & Burping

Take it off: “A warm, snugly baby may be too cozy to wake up and eat. Removing a layer can perk a baby up just enough to get her going.”

Kim Ladd, NICU nurse, Prentice Women’s Hospital

Refusal relief: “If they’re spitting up a lot, we recommend holding those babies upright or in a bouncy seat for about 30 minutes after a feeding before you put them back down.”

Tawney Brady, ISCU nurse, NorthShore Evanston Hospital

Get groovy, baby: “If you can’t get a burp out, just lay your baby flat for a few second and then try again. Babies are like lava lamps. When you lay them down, the air goes up!”

Christina Vasquez, NICU nurse, NorthShore Evanston Hospital

Dressing

Zip it: “Dressing your baby can get frustrating if you are dealing with 14 snaps on the front of the outfit that no matter what you do just don’t seem to fit together. I seem to always find one snap left over and have to struggle to redo them carefully to match them up correctly. So, if you find this to be the case for you, too, look for outfits with zippers! No snaps to worry about! Just zip it up, and you’re done!”

Sarah Testa, RNC-NICU, NICU discharge planner, Rush University Medical Center

Stay shiver-free: “Wash their bodies first, dry them off, then wrap them up in a nice warm towel and wash the hair last. They stay warmer and more calm that way.”

Christina Vasquez

Start a rubdown routine: “When you massage your baby, that’s when you can really look at her and see if there’s anything new or different. And use a little baby oil.”

Tawnya Williams, NICU nurse, Prentice Women’s Hospital

Take your mitts off me: “Don’t put mitts on their hands. If their hands are covered, they can only receive touch, not give. You’re blocking their neuropathways. It’s important for brain development!”

Kim Ladd

Sleeping

Your moment of zen: “Contrary to what most people think, it does not need to be silent for your baby to sleep. Try a television or radio with talk shows as background noise. If this helps your baby sleep, you can gradually reduce the volume over time until it’s off.”

Sarah Testa

A toasty tip: “Babies like warm blankets. Put one in the dryer to warm it up. Then, swaddle the baby and hold him. That helps them calm down and go to sleep.”

Tawny Brady

Dressing FOR SUCCESS: “Roll up the extremities like panty hose and then pop the arms and legs right through! I’ve saved a lot of trouble with that one.”

Christina Vasquez

Safety

Be car seat savvy: “Please read the instructions, and do not throw them away! Review them. Or check YouTube. They have nice demonstrations!”

Tawnya Williams

Trust your instincts: “As parents, you get to know what is normal for your baby and you know them best, so if you feel something is quite right, don’t hesitate to call your pediatrician. With a newborn, it’s always better to be safe than sorry.”

Sarah Testa

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