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BATHING A BABY IS JUST ONE OF MANY LITTLE CHALLENGES FACING PARENTS. THESE EXPERT TIPS SHOULD KEEP THE TEARS – AND ANY FEARS – AWAY

WORDS **BRONWYN MCNUITY**

Philosopher and theologian St Thomas Aquinas said nothing alleviates sorrow like a good sleep, a bath and a glass of wine. And while you should keep the glass of wine for yourself (best enjoyed after the children are safely tucked up in bed), it's hard to think of anything that calms a fractious little better than a bath.

'If your newborn is having a really crazy evening, a bath can help him or her to settle,' says Jo Ryan, who runs parenting advisory and support service Babybliss. 'Fill the bath or tub really full so the baby can float in your arms. Swing the baby back and forth and they will calm right down.'

NEWBORNS

Grappling with a slippery newborn can be a scary prospect for parents. That's why there is a certain procedure to follow when bathing young babies.

First, decide what you will bathe your baby in: a baby bath, a normal bath or the laundry tub.

Dr Jane Svensson, health education coordinator at Royal Hospital for Women, Randwick, points out that if you are using a baby bath, you must consider how you are going to fill it – from the tap, a shower hose or with a jug? 'Baby baths get very heavy when full of water,' she says. 'You also need a space beside your bath where you can undress and dry the baby.'

Mary McDonald, nurse educator at family care centre Tresillian says ensure you have everything to hand. 'You need cotton wool, a wash cloth, towels, a clean nappy and clothes nearby,' she says. 'Place the bath at waist height and test the water temperature on the inside of your wrist. You just need water – soap can dry their skin out.'

Next, undress your baby, leaving their nappy on, and wrap them in a towel. Holding them under one arm, a bit like a football, start with their face. 'Wash each eye with a different cotton wool

ball, from the inside corner towards the side of the face,' says McDonald. 'Then wash the rest of your baby's face and head with a wash cloth.'

Now remove the nappy and, cradling the baby with your hand wrapped firmly around their far upper arm, gently lower them into the water.

'Wash your baby's bottom last, from the front to the back,' says McDonald. 'With boys, the foreskin doesn't usually come back until they are about four so wait until you see them doing it themselves before pulling it back to wash.'

Dry your baby well, especially between the folds of skin under their arms and neck, the back of the knees and in the groin area.

And there you have it. Phew. Fortunately this rather elaborate ritual doesn't need to be carried out every day. 'Every other day is fine, otherwise you're just making work for yourself,' she says.

You can always hop into the big bath with your baby, but you will need another adult present to take the baby once you're finished.

BIGGER BABIES

When your baby is a couple of months old, fill the bath with an inch or so of water and lie your baby down on his back. 'Babies really enjoy this,' says Gill Patterson, a clinical nurse consultant in child and family health at The Children's Hospital at Westmead. 'Things change again once your baby sits up. Then it's about making sure they have toys and keeping them entertained.'

Filling your tub with cold, then hot, then cold water will ensure you never put a baby into a too-hot bath and that the taps will be cool should your child come into contact with them.

Plain water is probably still all you need to get your baby clean. 'They only need shampoo when they have a fair bit of hair,' says Patterson.

And it is the dreaded act of hair washing that causes most of the dramas later on. 'Shampooing

can be a nightmare,' says Ryan, 'but if you start pouring water over your child's head and face from early on, they'll get used to it.'

While parents of toddlers may occasionally find that getting children into the bath is difficult, the real dilemma is more likely to be about when it is time to get out. 'Persuading children to get out of the bath has been a problem for as long as I can remember,' says Patterson. 'It's usually about making a deal with them such as: "when you get out of the bath, it's story time".'

McDonald says distraction works a treat. 'Ask them to pull the plug and warn them that bath time is nearly over,' she advises. 'Make the next activity something fun to entice them out.'

Most importantly – don't leave young children in the bathtub unattended, ever. ●

BATHTIME TOYS

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