

# EXCEL PEDIATRICS

721 Tilghman Drive, Suite 300, Dunn, NC 28334 – 910.843.5437 – 910.897.7145 (fax)

609 Attain Street, Suite 181, Fuquay Varina, NC 27526 – 919.557.5433 – 919.557.6279 (fax)

## NEWBORN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT, COMMON CONCERNS

Although you may feel prepared for your baby, the reality of the constant care a newborn needs can shock many parents. A newborn affects your life in ways that simply can't be anticipated. It is only through experience that parents can fully understand the impact of these new responsibilities and how your expected roles change. It is normal to shift frequently between feeling confident and ecstatic one minute to drained, scared, and unsure the next.

When you realize that your baby is completely physically dependent on you, you may worry whether you are giving your baby the best care. Common issues in this first month include:

**Umbilical cord care:** basic care of your baby's umbilical cord is keeping it clean and dry. Gently clean the umbilical cord stump and the surrounding skin with a small amount of rubbing alcohol as needed during diaper changes. The most important aspect of umbilical cord care is keeping the cord dry, this means no submersion baths until the cord has fallen off. The stump should fall off within a couple of weeks, although sometimes it takes longer. If there is redness around the cord, drainage, or a foul odor coming from the stump you should bring the baby to the office to be seen.

**Newborn sleepiness:** in the first few days after birth, your baby will be sleeping a lot and may only wake during feeds or diaper changes. Your baby will become gradually more alert throughout the month. By the end of the first month, your baby will likely begin developing sleeping and eating patterns. Your baby will likely have periods where he or she is awake for 2-3 hours straight. Around 3 months of age, the pattern will become more predictable.

**Exhaustion and sleep deprivation:** although newborns sleep a lot, they also wake up a lot for brief periods and need feeding, diapering, and attention. Nights of long, restorative sleep can seem a foggy memory to parents. This may be especially true for mothers who start with a deficit after the physical exertion of and recovery from giving birth. Be sure to ask for help when you need it. Don't hesitate to ask a family member, friend, or neighbor to help you with daily tasks such as laundry, cleaning, or making meals. This can help you to nap while your baby sleeps.

**Eating concerns:** worrying whether your baby is getting enough to eat? This is especially a common concern among breast-feeding mothers. As long as your baby feeds regularly (every 2 hours in the first few weeks, then every 2 to 4 hours over the next few weeks), he or she should be getting enough nutrition. Sometimes you may need to wake a sleep baby to eat. During your well-child checkups, your health care provider will monitor your baby's weight gain and growth. It is also important for a breast-

feeding mother to drink plenty of water throughout the day. Also, be aware of general signs that your baby is getting enough breast milk, such as wetting about 6-8 diapers and having at least 1 or 2 bowel movements in a 24 hour period. A website that may address some of your breastfeeding concerns is <http://www.llli.org> (La Leche League International). For infants that are formula-fed, they generally consume about 2-3 ounces every 2-3 hours.

**Newborn jaundice**: many babies get jaundice (also called hyperbilirubinemia) in their first few days of life. Jaundice is a condition in which the skin and the whites of a baby's eyes appear yellow because of a build-up of bilirubin in the blood. Bilirubin is a yellow/brown substance produced by the breakdown of red blood cells. Although jaundice should be monitored, it most often does not require medical treatment. Usually, increasing the number of feedings helps reduce jaundice. Phototherapy, in which a baby is placed under special lights or fiber optic blankets, may be used if bilirubin levels are too high. Keep your baby's well-child appointments with your doctor, or call anytime if you are concerned about jaundice.

**Abnormal head shape**: immediately after birth, especially after a lengthy vaginal delivery, your baby's head may look misshapen. This is normal, and your baby's head will most likely take on a more normal shape within a few days to weeks after delivery. But in rare instances, a misshapen head can be a sign of an abnormal condition, such as craniosynostosis. After your baby is born and during your baby's well child checkups, your health care provider will monitor your baby's head shape and growth. If you are concerned that your newborn's head has not returned to a normal shape within several weeks of delivery, talk with your child's health care provider.

\*A website that may address overall concerns of your infant from birth through adolescence is <http://www.healthychildren.org> (the website in general has great resources, you can click on the tab at the left labeled 'Ages and Stages' and this will give you helpful information regarding your newborn). This website gives you anticipatory guidance including feeding, development, sleep, and numerous other topics. This website is a great resource for you as you learn about your new baby!