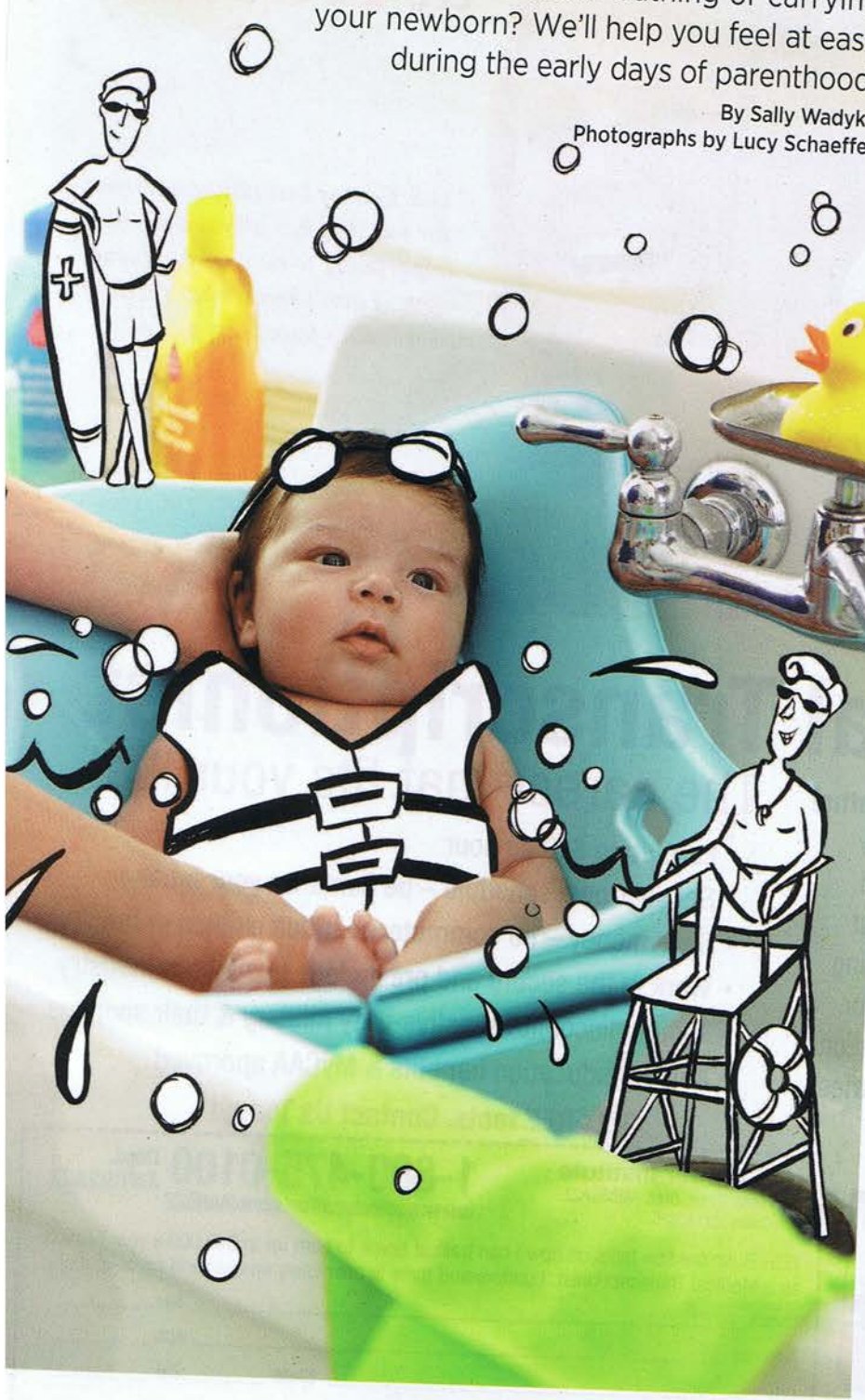


# don't be scared, mom!

Nervous about bathing or carrying your newborn? We'll help you feel at ease during the early days of parenthood.

By Sally Wadyka  
Photographs by Lucy Schaeffer



**T** rue confession: When it came time to leave the hospital with my baby girl and care for her on my own, I was convinced that I'd do everything wrong. Even the most basic tasks (carrying Amelia around the house, changing her diaper, driving her to the pediatrician) terrified me. It's a classic rookie-mom reaction. "New motherhood brings an enormous sense of responsibility," says Diane Sanford, Ph.D., coauthor of *Life Will Never Be the Same: The Real Mom's Postpartum Survival Guide*. "You're also exhausted, which makes everything nerve-racking."

Add in postpartum hormones surging through your body, and your mind can start playing tricks on you. New moms have more oxytocin in their system, which serves to heighten their response to hearing their baby cry or seeing her in their distress. But it also causes "the fight or flight response to kick in more easily, triggering the release of stress hormones—which can make you feel even more anxious," Dr. Sanford says.

What's a newly minted mama to do? First, take a deep breath. Then heed this advice on how to perform angst-provoking tasks like a pro.

### **Mommy Fear** If I try to clean his umbilical stump, I'll reopen the scab.

Relax! You don't even have to touch it. "The new recommendations are to just ignore it," says Tanya Altmann, M.D., author of *Mommy Calls*. Exposure to air will help dry the scab out: Fold diapers down so they don't cover it (or use Pampers Swaddlers Sensitive or Huggies Little Snugglers diapers for newborns, which have an umbilical

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cord cutout). Until the scab has fallen off, avoid the tub; give him sponge baths instead. If the area gets wet, dry it gently, but there's no need to wash it or swab it with alcohol. The stump should fall off within a week or two. "A bit of blood-tinged fluid is normal for a couple of days after that," Dr. Altmann says. If discharge lasts longer, or the area around the belly button seems red, or if your newborn has a fever, call the doctor to make sure your sweetie doesn't have an infection.

**Mommy Fear I'll drop my baby.**

It's the stuff of a novice mom's nightmares: You slip while carrying your baby, and she goes flying to the floor. And it can certainly happen. "I was holding my 13-month-old while going down the stairs, and I missed a step," recalls Paige Dalton, of Leonardtown, Maryland. "I was in hysterics, but my son was fine and back to normal within minutes."

How to help prevent a similar slip when you're carrying your little one? "Move slowly, and think carefully about every step you're taking," says Carole Kramer Arsenault, R.N., author of *The Baby Nurse Bible*. Pay attention to your surroundings: Don't walk around in socks on wood floors, and make sure there are no throw rugs you might trip on or other objects in your way. If going up and down your staircase while holding your newborn is too scary to handle, "set up a changing and napping area on the first floor of your home so you can go downstairs just once in the morning and then stay there until bedtime," Dr. Altmann suggests. After a week or two, you'll feel confident enough to take the stairs.

In the unfortunate event that you do drop your newborn, try not to panic. "If the fall was onto a soft surface and your infant is acting normal, watch her carefully for any signs of injury, such as continuous



change, then put an extra dab inside the diaper,” Arsenault recommends. And don’t be freaked out if you see a yellowish scab on the tip. It’s normal and should disappear within two weeks.

**Mommy Fear** If something is wrong with my baby while I’m driving, I won’t know.

It took weeks before I could confidently hit the road with Amelia in tow. I couldn’t see her in her rear-facing seat, so if she cried, I would call to mind worst-case scenarios, fearing she’d gotten pinched by the straps or injured herself. The anxiety sometimes made *me* cry!

Driving with Baby doesn’t have to be a wild emotional ride, though. Dr. Altmann recommends that you do a safety check before you go

anywhere, to set your mind at ease: Make sure that your sweetie is strapped in securely, the car seat is clicked into its base, and there’s nothing that could fall on her if you stop short. If you’re really rattled, bring your partner or a friend along so he or she can ride in the backseat with the baby while you focus on the road.

**When carrying Baby, move slowly and think about each step. And never walk around in socks on wood floors!**

crying, lethargy, poor feeding, irritability, or moving her extremities asymmetrically,” Dr. Altmann says. “However, if your baby falls onto a hard surface, loses consciousness, or is not acting normal, or if you have any concerns whatsoever, call 911 or head to the hospital right away.”

**Mommy Fear** I’ll irritate my son’s circumcision if I try to care for it.

“I avoided wiping my baby’s penis because I was so afraid I would hurt him,” admits Brie Doyle, of Boulder, Colorado. Until it’s healed, the best way to care for this area during a change is to skip the wipes and use a squirt bottle filled with warm water to rinse away any stool or urine that gets on the penis, Arsenault says. To make sure your little guy stays comfy, prevent his diaper from sticking to his penis while the circumcision heals. “For the first few days, coat the penis with an antibiotic ointment such as Bacitracin at every diaper

**Mommy Fear** My infant might slip out of my hands in the bathtub.

Babies are slick when wet, no doubt about it. Good thing it’s fine to continue giving your munchkin sponge baths for the first month. Ready to bathe him in his tub? First, set everything you’ll need within arm’s reach, including the washcloth, baby wash, and towel. Next, soap up then rinse one area of his body at a time to prevent him from getting too slippery. “Work from head to toe, always keeping one hand on the baby and using the other to wash him,” Arsenault says. (Watch our video at

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When you take your little guy out of the tub, lift him from under his armpits, then immediately lay him on a towel (on the floor by the tub, if you need to) and wrap him up. "Don't walk anywhere with a wet, naked baby," Arsenault warns. "Once he's wrapped up, he'll be easier to carry."

**Mommy Fear I'll injure my baby when using a rectal thermometer.**

Especially when your newborn is already fussy, it's tempting to use the thermometer under her armpit or try a temporal one (the kind that scans the forehead).

"My husband once caught me putting the thermometer between my daughter's tushy cheeks because I couldn't bear to actually stick it in," admits Wendy Cloutier, a mom of two in Boston. But as much as

you might cringe at the thought of inserting something *there*, a rectal temperature is the most accurate reading for a newborn. Once she's 3 months old, you can start using an electronic ear thermometer or a digital thermometer to take an underarm reading, although these methods give a less precise result.

"I've never seen a baby get injured from a thermometer," Dr. Altmann says. To use one safely, lay your baby on her back on the changing table or the floor, then grab her feet and lift her up, the same way you would to wipe her bottom during a diaper change. Take the thermometer, dip it in petroleum jelly, then insert it about half an inch into her rectum so the tip is completely inside her bottom. "It won't hurt your infant unless she starts wiggling around, so be sure to hold her firmly," Arsenault says. Like many anxiety-provoking baby tasks, this one is

easiest with two adults, one to hold the baby still, the other to do the honors. A word to the wise: This stimulation may produce a bowel movement, so have a diaper ready when you pull the thermometer out.

**Mommy Fear I'll nick a finger when I try to trim those tiny nails.**

Hold off on clipping your babe's nails until he's a few weeks old, because they remain attached to the skin for a while after he's born, Dr. Altmann says. Still, you don't want your baby to scratch himself, so once his nails start growing away from the skin, clip them. (Resist the temptation to nibble them off—the bacteria in your mouth could lead to infection.)

Dr. Altmann suggests double-teaming at first: "You or your partner can hold the baby still while the other clips," she says. Occupy your little

**Infant nails are tiny but sharp. Trim them to keep baby from scratching himself.**

squirmers' free hand with a toy, so he's not inclined to grab at you, then grasp his other palm with one hand, taking hold of one finger at a time and delicately pulling the finger pad away from the nail. Use a clean pair of infant nail clippers or scissors to gently cut the nail along the curve of the finger in one or two snips. Be sure to leave a little white behind; cutting down to the quick can be painful for your baby. (For further instructions, visit [americanbaby.com/clip](http://americanbaby.com/clip) and watch our clipping how-to video.) If you accidentally nick your baby's tiny finger, relax—it will heal in no time. "Place firm pressure on the bleeding area until it stops," says Dr. Altmann. Finish the job by filing away any sharp edges with an infant nail file. Of course, if you're truly terrified of using clippers on your cutie, you can simply file his nails to the right length—the manicure just may take a little longer. ●

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