

Swaddling 101

Remember—always put your baby to sleep on her back!

■ *When can I start swaddling?*

Babies can be swaddled as soon as they're born. It makes them feel cozy and warm, like they're "back home."

■ *Do all babies need to be swaddled?*

Many calm babies do well with no swaddling at all. But the fussier your baby is, the more she'll need to be swaddled. Tight bundling is so successful at soothing infants that some babies even have to be unswaddled to wake them up for feedings.

■ *Should the swaddling always be snug or are loose blankets okay?*

Never put your baby into bed with loose blankets. Make sure her swaddling is snugly wrapped around her so it doesn't loosen during the night. Loose blankets can get around a baby's face and contribute to sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

■ *How can I tell if my baby is overheated or overwrapped?*

Premature babies often need incubators to keep them toasty, but full-term babies just need a little clothing, a blanket, and a room that is between 65° and 70° F. If the

temperature in your home is warmer than that, you can skip some clothing. In hot weather, you can wrap your baby naked in a light cotton blanket. (Parents living in warm climates often put cornstarch powder on their baby's skin to absorb sweat and prevent rashes.)

Always check to see if your baby is overheated by feeling her ears and fingers. If she's hot, red, and sweaty, she's overwrapped. If she's only slightly warm and not sweaty, her temperature is probably perfect.

■ *How can I tell if I'm swaddling my baby too tightly?*

In traditional cultures, parents swaddle their babies tightly because loose wraps invariably pop open. Although some Americans worry about tight swaddling, most of the time bundling fails because it is done too loosely.

For your peace of mind, here's an easy way for you to make sure your wrapping is not too tight. Slide your hand between the blanket and your baby's chest. It should feel as snug as your hand slid between your pregnant belly and the elastic waistband of your pants at the end of your ninth month.

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■ Can swaddling help a baby sleep?

Yes! In fact, even babies who don't need wrapping to keep calm often sleep more when they're swaddled. Bundling keeps them from startling themselves awake. In my experience, swaddling plus white noise can add one to two hours to a baby's nighttime sleep.

■ If a baby has never been swaddled, at what age is it too late to start?

Even if you have never swaddled your baby before, swaddling may still help soothe her "fussies" during her first three months of life. But, be patient. You may have to wrap her a few times before she gets used to it. Try doing it when she's already sleepy and in her most receptive frame of mind.

■ When is a baby too old to continue to be swaddled?

The age for weaning off the wrapping varies from baby to baby. Many people think they should stop swaddling after a few weeks, when their baby starts resisting it. But, actually, this is when swaddling becomes the most valuable.

To decide if your infant no longer needs to be wrapped, try this: After she reaches 2 to 3 months of age, swaddle her with one arm out. If she gets fussier, continue wrapping (with both arms in) for a few more weeks. However, if she still sleeps well with one arm out, she probably doesn't need swaddling any more.

Most babies are ready to be weaned off wrapping by 3 to 4 months of age, although some continue to need the wrapping to help them sleep up to 9 months of age.

■ How many hours a day should a baby be wrapped?

All babies need some time to stretch, bathe, and get a massage. But, you'll probably notice your baby is calmer if she's swaddled 12 to 20 hours a day, to start with. (Remember, as a fetus, she was snuggled 24 hours a day.) After one or two months, you can reduce wrap time according to how calm she is without it.

Adapted from *The Happiest Baby on the Block* (Bantam Books, 2002)