

# Diaper Rash

*Diaper rash* is the term used to describe a rash or irritation in the area covered by the diaper. The first sign of diaper rash is usually redness or small bumps on the lower abdomen, buttocks, genitals, and thigh folds—surfaces that have been in direct contact with the wet or soiled diaper. This type of diaper rash is rarely serious and usually clears in three or four days with appropriate care. The most common causes of diaper rash include:

1. Leaving a wet diaper on too long. The moisture makes the skin more susceptible to chafing. Over time, the urine in the diaper decomposes, forming chemicals that can further irritate the skin.
2. Leaving a stool-soiled diaper on too long. Digestive agents in the stool then attack the skin, making it more susceptible to a rash.



Regardless of how the rash begins, once the surface of the skin is damaged, it becomes even more vulnerable to further irritation by contact with urine and stool and to subsequent infection with bacteria or yeast. Yeast infections are common in this area and often appear as a rash on the thighs, genitals, and lower abdomen, but they almost never appear on the buttocks.

Although most babies develop diaper rash at some point during infancy, it happens less often in babies who are breastfed (for reasons we still do not know). Diaper rash occurs more often at particular ages and under certain conditions:

- Among babies eight to ten months old
- If babies are not kept clean and dry
- When babies have diarrhea
- When a baby starts to eat solid food (probably due to changes in the digestive process caused by the new variety of foods)
- When a baby is taking antibiotics (because these drugs encourage the growth of yeast organisms that can infect the skin)

To reduce your baby's risk of diaper rash, make these steps part of your diapering routine:

1. Change the diaper as soon as possible after a bowel movement. Cleanse the diaper area with a soft cloth and water after each bowel movement. Avoid using diaper wipes which may irritate the skin further.
2. Change wet diapers frequently to reduce skin exposure to moisture.
3. Expose the baby's bottom to air whenever feasible. When using plastic pants or disposable diapers with tight gathers around the abdomen and legs, make sure air can circulate inside the diaper.

If a diaper rash develops in spite of your efforts, begin using an oil-based barrier (ointment) to prevent further irritation from the urine or stool. The rash should improve noticeably within forty-eight to seventy-two hours. If it doesn't, consult your pediatrician.

Last Updated: 10/31/2013

Source: Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5 (Copyright © 2009 American Academy of Pediatrics)  
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# When Diaper Rash Strikes

Take a few sensible steps to keep baby's bottom in good health.

A red bottom is the last thing you want to find when you open your baby's diaper. But it's not unusual for infants and toddlers to develop diaper rash, a skin condition that occurs from wearing diapers. "Diaper rash is very common," says Daniel Krowchuk, M.D., FAAP, chief of general pediatrics and adolescent medicine at Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C. "A study we published in 2000 indicated that approximately 25 percent of children make a visit to a provider for this condition." The first and most obvious symptom is redness of the skin on areas in direct contact with the diaper. "Parents may notice redness, bumps or breaks in the skin in or around the diaper area," says Tanya Remer Altmann, M.D., FAAP, associate medical editor of *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child, Birth to Age 5* (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2009) and a pediatrician in Westlake Village, Calif. "Sometimes the skin can be uncomfortable or tender to touch. Some babies will fuss or cry when changed if the rash is bothering them."

Most rashes are the result of leaving your baby in a wet or soiled diaper for too long. Moisture from a soiled diaper can harm your baby's skin and make it more prone to chafing. In more severe cases there may be painful open sores. Once the skin is irritated and damaged, your baby will become vulnerable to yeast or bacterial infections.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, more than half of babies between 4 months and 15 months of age will develop diaper rash at least once in a two-month period. Diaper rash is most common between 8 to 10 months of age. It's also common when babies have frequent bowel movements or diarrhea.

Diaper rash is more likely when babies start to eat solid food, which causes changes in the digestive process. Babies are more vulnerable too, if they — or their nursing mothers — are taking antibiotics, which makes them prone to yeast infections.

## Get the Red Out

Healing the rash involves being more vigilant about changing your baby's diapers. While your baby is battling a bout of diaper rash, here's what you can do:

- **Rinse the affected area with warm water.** Repeat the process with each diaper change until the rash subsides. Wash with a mild soap only after a bowel movement since overusing soap can disrupt the healing process.
- **Choose the right kind of wipes.** Avoid wipes that contain alcohol or fragrances. "If wipes seem to bother your infant, try plain water with a soft paper towel or wash cloth until the rash heals," Dr. Altmann says.
- **Expose your baby's bottom to air.** Let your baby wear a loose diaper so air can circulate. While she's napping, take the diaper off and lay her on a towel. Drying out the area will reduce the risk of developing a yeast infection.
- **Consider a good soak.** Soaking in an oatmeal bath can help soothe a sore bottom, Dr. Altmann says.

## Keeping Rash at Bay

Fortunately, you can take steps to prevent diaper rash, especially if you know your child is vulnerable. Apply a thick layer of diaper ointment that contains zinc oxide on to your baby's bottom at every diaper change. Avoid putting the diaper on too tightly, which will trap the moisture and discourage air circulation. A petroleum jelly type product also works well.

Consider using extra absorbent diapers, too. "With the advent of super-absorbent diapers, which wick moisture away from the skin and keep the skin dry, the frequency of irritant diaper dermatitis has declined greatly," says Dr. Krowchuk, who is also former chair of the AAP Section on Dermatology.

And make sure to change your child's diaper frequently. "Changing the diaper promptly after it becomes wet or soiled is the best way to prevent diaper rash," Dr. Krowchuk says.

## When to Call the Doctor

If you're using an over-the-counter diaper ointment, and your baby's diaper rash still doesn't improve after a few days, or is even getting worse, call your pediatrician. The rash may have developed a yeast infection.

"Depending on the type of rash, your doctor may recommend a yeast cream, especially if the rash is bright reddish pink and raised with bumps surrounding it, which are signs of a candida or yeast diaper rash," Dr. Altmann says.

The good news is, diaper rash can be prevented and is easily treated. "Once children are toilet trained and out of diapers, the problem goes away," Dr. Krowchuk says.

This article was featured in Healthy Children Magazine.

Last Updated: 9/2/2014

Source: Healthy Children Magazine, Summer 2010

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## What can I do if my baby gets diaper rash?

If your baby gets diaper rash (and to prevent future diaper rashes) it's important to keep the area as clean and dry as possible. Change wet or soiled diapers right away. This helps cut down how much moisture is on the skin.

- Gently clean the diaper area with water and a soft washcloth. Disposable diaper wipes may also be used. Avoid wipes that contain alcohol and fragrance. Use soap and water only if the stool does not come off easily. If the rash is severe, use a squirt bottle of water so you can clean and rinse without rubbing.
- Pat dry; do not rub. Allow the area to air-dry fully.
- Apply a thick layer of protective ointment or cream (such as one that contains zinc oxide or petroleum jelly). These ointments are usually thick and pasty and do not have to be completely removed at the next diaper change. Remember, heavy scrubbing or rubbing will only damage the skin more.
- Do not put the diaper on too tight, especially overnight. Keep the diaper loose so that the wet and soiled parts do not rub against the skin as much.
- Use creams with steroids only if your pediatrician recommends them. They are rarely needed and may be harmful.
- Check with your pediatrician if the rash
  - Has blisters or pus-filled sores
  - Does not go away within 2 to 3 days
  - Gets worse

## Causes of Diaper Rash

Over the years diaper rash has been blamed on many causes, such as teething, diet, and ammonia in the urine. However, we now believe it is caused by any of the following:

- Too much moisture
- Chafing or rubbing
- When urine, stools, or both touch the skin for long periods of time
- Yeast infection
- Bacterial infection
- Allergic reaction to diaper material

When skin stays wet for too long, it starts to break down. When wet skin is rubbed, it also damages more easily. Moisture from a soiled diaper can harm your baby's skin and make it more prone to chafing. When this happens, a diaper rash may develop.

More than half of babies between 4 and 15 months of age develop diaper rash at least once in a 2-month period. Diaper rash occurs more often when

- Babies get older—mostly between 8 to 10 months of age.
- Babies are not kept clean and dry.
- Babies have frequent stools, especially when the stools stay in their diapers overnight.
- Babies have diarrhea.
- Babies begin to eat solid foods.
- Babies are taking antibiotics, or in nursing babies whose mothers are taking antibiotics.

### Call the Pediatrician If:

- The rash does not look like it's going away or gets worse 2 to 3 days after treatment.
- The rash includes blisters or pus-filled sores.
- Your baby is taking an antibiotic and has a bright red rash with red spots at its edges. This might be a yeast infection.
- Your baby has a fever along with a rash.
- The rash is very painful. Your baby might have a skin condition called cellulitis.

Last Updated: 12/3/2013

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