

Swaddled bathing



Swaddled bathing is a well researched and recommended method of bathing that improves the bathing experience of the preterm or medically unwell baby, supporting their physiological stability and behavioural organization.

Swaddled bathing is a developmentally supportive process involving swaddling the baby in a flexed midline position, using a soft muslin or light sheet. The baby is immersed in a tub of warm water up to their shoulders, and washing them by unwrapping/wrapping their limbs systematically, supporting their regulation for a 'spa-like' experience. It is a lovely way to get to know your baby and to share special time with them - to relax together.

Supporting your baby in their bath

During the bath, it's important to remember to watch for those behavioural cues (their actions and behaviours) that your baby is using to communicate how they are coping. Watching and recognising these cues tells you when to keep going, when to pause, and when to put in more support to settle them again. Here are some examples of behavioural cues your baby might use.

'I like this' cues:

- Soft eyes
- regular breathing
- smooth movements
- relaxed hands and feet
- smooth face

'I need more support' cues:

- arms / legs extending
- finger / toe splaying
- skin colour change
- jerky movements
- face grimacing

Tips and tricks

- Dim the lighting and make it a spa experience
- Throughout the process, **talk, hum or gently sing to your baby**
- Use long, moderate pressure strokes when washing.
- Pause and support whenever your baby becomes unsettled
- A pacifier is a great tool to use if they need extra support - the sucking action is calming and soothing.
- If at any time your baby is unsettled, pause, rewrap and wait for your baby to settle again.

How to swaddle bath

What you'll need

- Standard baby bath
- Soft wash cloth or gauze
- Thermometer
- Muslin or very light sheet
- Baby bath (optional) – pH neutral
- BathTowel x2
- A partner to help!

Preparation

- Water temperature should be at approx. 37 degrees C
- The bath should be deep enough to immerse your baby up to their shoulders and allow floating
- The bath should be no longer than 8 minutes duration
- You should hold your baby so that their head is out the water with their shoulders supported all times, and never with your hand wrapped around their neck.

Step by step

Preparation

- Gently swaddle your baby in a clean dry **thin** sheet or muslin, with their hands toward their middle and face making sure their shoulders are free.
- Lower your baby into the bath slowly, moving them down the bath so their feet are against the end of the bath for support
- Keep one hand under your baby's head/shoulders and move the other to rest across their chest and arms.

Washing

- Unwrap one arm at a time - wash and rewrap. Repeat with the other arm and legs.
- Wash back through the muslin or sheet.
- With clean water and gauze, gently wash your baby's face and hair with long strokes from forehead to back
- If your baby is calm, remove wrap slowly, watching for signs of needing your support.
- Keep using your hand to support their hands to their middle.
- Move them gently and slowly back and forth in the water, providing gentle movement

Drying

- Your support person can now hold your baby and remove the swaddle, whilst you place a warm dry towel across your chest.
- Your support person will lift your baby to your chest , holding them on their side, tucking their legs up and leaving the wrap behind in the bath water.
- After a cuddle in the towel, gently dry and dress your baby in a nappy and warm dry clothing.

Scan the QR code
to watch a swaddled bath

