



Nappy Rash



Nappy rash is skin irritation caused by urine, bowel motions or other irritants, usually around the napkin area. Good nappy changing habits can reduce nappy rash, but most babies get some nappy rash no matter how well they are cared for.

Causes

A baby's skin may be irritated or damaged by contact with:

- Bowel motions (faeces/stools/poo) – especially loose motions caused by certain foods, medicines, infections or teething
- Urine (wee) – especially when the nappy is left on too long or is covered by plastic pants. Plastic pants make nappy rash more likely by keeping the baby's skin warm, wet and airless
- Irritant chemicals – in nappy change creams and skin wipes, or in cloth nappies which have not been rinsed completely clean. Detergents, bleach, water softeners, fabric softeners and nappy rinses can be irritant
- Friction – rough cloth nappies can damage sensitive skin.

Babies who have very sensitive skin or suffer from skin disorders (e.g., eczema/dermatitis, psoriasis) are more likely to get nappy rash.



Signs & symptoms

Simple nappy rash is a burn-like rash around the nappy area. It is red, swollen, moist and slightly rough or scaly. The rash can spread to the tummy and buttocks.

- Nappy rash can become infected with a fungus called candida (thrush). This usually causes a brighter red, shiny rash with sharply outlined patches, often with smaller spots out of the main area. The skin folds of the groin and thighs may also be red.
- Nappy rash can become infected with bacteria. This may cause weeping or yellow crusting of the rash area and a fever.

Nappy rash can be painful and a baby with nappy rash can be very unsettled.

Important

Consult a doctor if:

- Rash spreads outside the nappy area
- Rash is no better after five days of treatment
- Skin is broken and rash is severe
- Rash shows signs of bacterial infection (e.g., pus, weeping)
- Baby also has a fever, is irritable, is not eating well or generally seems ill.

Treatment

A pharmacist can give advice about managing nappy rash and the products available to help treat and prevent it.

Simple nappy rash

- Check and change nappies frequently, especially cloth nappies, to reduce the time the irritated skin is in contact with urine or bowel motions. If using cloth nappies, do not use plastic overpants.
- While the baby has nappy rash, use disposable nappies if possible, as they keep the skin drier, especially overnight. Choose the most absorbent type.
- Clean the baby's bottom with plain warm water at each nappy change. If this does not clean well enough, try a gentle, non-soap cleanser. Avoid soap, talcum powder and nappy wipes as these may further irritate the skin.
- Leave the nappy off as often as possible to expose the area to the air. Take care if the baby is outdoors as a baby's skin is sensitive and burns very easily.
- Apply a water-repellant, soothing barrier cream or ointment, after cleaning the baby's bottom, at each nappy change. This provides a water-resistant protective layer, prevents moisture loss and helps soothe the baby's skin.
- Non-soap bath solutions and oils can be added to the baby's bath to help settle skin irritation (e.g., oilated oatmeal or a handful of oats in the foot of an old stocking)
- After washing, thoroughly rinse cloth nappies to remove traces of detergents or other chemicals. Nappies can be softened by tumble drying
- Give paracetamol for pain relief if the baby is unsettled.

More severe nappy rash

- Hydrocortisone cream or ointment, which reduces inflammation, may be used for a short time to treat a severe rash.
- If the rash is infected with a fungus (e.g., thrush) an anti-fungal cream or ointment may be needed.
- Consult a doctor if nappy rash does not clear with hydrocortisone and antifungal treatment, or if bacterial infection is suspected.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

Prevention

- Change wet or dirty nappies straight away.
- Gently wash the baby's bottom at each nappy change with warm water using a soft cloth or cotton wool. Use a non-drying, non-soap cleanser when necessary. If using skin wipes, only use non-alcohol wipes that are made for babies.
- Pat dry and leave uncovered until completely dry.
- Apply a protective, barrier cream or ointment at each nappy change.
- If possible, use highly-absorbent disposable nappies, especially at night.
- Expose skin in the nappy area to air as much as possible by giving the baby frequent nappy-free times.

If using cloth nappies:

- Rinse wet or dirty nappies before placing in nappy soaking solution. Use gloves or wash hands well after handling dirty nappies.
- Wash nappies with pure soap or detergent for sensitive skin.
- Rinse nappies well after washing, to remove soap and chemicals.
- Use a one-way nappy liner next to the baby's skin and avoid plastic overpants.

Related fact cards

- *Dermatitis and Psoriasis*
- *Sense in the Sun* (website only – ask your pharmacist)
- *Thrush*

For more information

The local Baby, Child or Infant Health Centre – listed in the white pages of the phone book.

Health Insite – website www.healthinsite.gov.au

Nappy Rash Prevention Council – website www.nrpc.com.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacy Self Care Support – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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OINTMENT

Help stop nappy rash before it starts

