

The First Hours: What Happens to Your Newborn After Birth

After months of waiting, finally, your new baby has finally arrived. Giving birth is hard work for you and your baby, but this is just the beginning of your journey together. You may be surprised how much activity takes place in your birthing room immediately after you give birth. Here's what you can expect in those first hours after having your baby.

Usually after about a minute, the umbilical cord is cut. From the cut umbilical cord, your doctor will take a blood sample that is used to identify your baby's blood type and look for certain issues.

Spending time bonding with your baby in those first hours of life is very important. You can cuddle with your baby skin-to-skin right after his arrival. Sometimes called the "Magical Hour" or "Golden Hour", skin-to-skin contact right after giving birth has many health benefits. The sound of your heart is soothing to your little one and helps calm him.

This is why if your baby appears happy and healthy, he should be placed on your chest immediately after birth so you can both benefit from this skin-to-skin contact. This is a great time to start breastfeeding your baby. Research shows that babies who do skin-to-skin contact with their mother right after birth have a better latch.

While many babies start breastfeeding in the first hour of their life, don't get discouraged if your baby doesn't. A lactation consultant can help with the proper techniques and positions to feed your baby.

If you had a C-section, your baby will be handed to the pediatric team right when she is born. She will be dried off and quickly assessed, and then brought over to you. Skin-to-skin contact is just as important for babies born by C-section and can be done with some assistance while your doctor finishes your surgery. For some women, having their partner hold the baby during this time is preferred.

While still on your chest, your baby can be wiped down and given a quick health assessment. The nurse will check your baby's skin tone, heart rate, breathing, activity, muscle tone and reflexes. This assessment is used to assign an Apgar Score, which helps doctors quickly understand if your baby needs additional medical care.

"So, it really means the breathing rate, the color, the tone of the baby, sort of the overall wellness of the baby at birth. And it's measured in two specific increments, at one minute, and then five minutes, and then can be continued on in five-minute increments from there. But essentially, what it's useful for is determining, if any resuscitation is necessary for a newborn after delivery, immediately, how successful that resuscitation is."

Your baby will also be weighed and measured. You can also expect your baby to be given antibiotic eye drops to prevent eye infections and a Vitamin K shot to prevent excess bleeding. All of these can be done after that first golden hour of skin-to-skin – there is no need to interrupt that!

While still in the hospital, your baby will receive her first immunization for Hepatitis B and will get several more exams including a heel-prick blood test and hearing test. Talk to your doctor about what to expect immediately after having your baby and express any concerns you may have before your due date.

Remember after nine months of waiting, you will finally get to hold your baby in your arms and those first hours bonding with your newborn will be very special.