Diaper Rash

Diaper rash is a term used to describe red and sore skin on a baby’s bottom in the area covered by the diaper. The skin does not need to be broken down with blisters or rash to be called diaper rash.

Diaper rash is usually caused by skin being exposed to moisture (urine and bowel movements) for too long. The moisture irritates the skin, which starts to break down. The skin gets damaged when it rubs against the diaper. Chemicals in the urine and stool can further hurt the skin and could cause a rash. Irritated skin can be at risk for infection.

Some other causes of diaper rash may include:

- Baby has started eating solid foods
- Baby has frequent bowel movements or diarrhea
- Diaper is too tight
- Allergic reaction to the diaper material
- The breastfeeding mom or baby is taking antibiotics or other new medicines

How to prevent diaper rash

To prevent diaper rash:

- Keep the baby’s skin as clean and dry as possible.
- Change the diaper as soon as he or she wets or has a bowel movement.
- Clean the baby’s bottom with diaper wipes from front to back every time the diaper is changed. Avoid wipes that have alcohol or fragrances.
- Make sure to clean between the baby’s skin folds.
- If possible, let the skin air dry. Allow him to be without a diaper for a little while (Picture 1).
- If you know that your baby is at risk, after cleaning the skin, use an over-the-counter skin barrier or zinc oxide cream, such as petroleum jelly (Vaseline®), Desitin®, Triple Paste®, A+D® or Balmex®.
- Put diapers on loosely
What to do for diaper rash

If your baby’s skin gets irritated and red, there are several things you can do to treat the diaper rash. It should heal within 2 to 3 days.

- Change the diaper as soon as your baby wets or has a bowel movement. You may want to change the diaper once during the night.
- Rinse the baby’s bottom after each diaper change. Gently clean the diaper area with warm water and a soft washcloth (Picture 2).
- Use mild soap and water only if the stool does not come off easily.
- Avoid scrubbing or rubbing. It can damage the skin more.
- If the rash is severe, use a squirt bottle of water to clean and rinse without rubbing. Or, it might be helpful to soak the baby’s bottom in a tub of warm water after each diaper change.
- Try not to use baby wipes. Especially avoid those with alcohol or fragrances.
- Pat the skin dry. Allow the area to air-dry fully.
- Apply a thick layer of an over-the-counter skin barrier or zinc oxide cream. These creams do not have to be completely removed with each diaper change.
- Do not use steroidal creams or baby powder on your baby’s bottom.
- Let your baby play or nap with his diaper off. The air helps dry and heal the rash.
- Avoid rubber pants or plastic liners over the diaper.
- Put the diaper on loosely so that it does not rub against the skin as much.

When to call the doctor:

Call your baby’s doctor if:

- The rash does not go away or improve in 3 days, or if the rash gets worse.
- It starts to have blisters or is bright red with raised bumps.
- Your baby is taking an antibiotic and the skin is bright red with red spots.
- The rash is very painful.
- The baby has a fever along with a rash.