

Newborn Appearance

As parents anticipate the birth of their baby, they often try to imagine what their baby will look like. Usually images of the perfect "Gerber" baby comes to mind; however, the reality is often different immediately after birth. Babies may be covered with substances such as vernix or blood; they may have bumps and bruises or other spots, and may even have a "cone head." These are all normal newborn appearances. The following is an explanation of some of the most common appearances and their causes:

Vernix - a creamy-white, substance similar to cheese, that may cover the baby's body or may be found in the creases of the skin. Vernix is a protective covering for the fetus while in utero. It acts as a natural lotion and may be gently rubbed into the skin or removed with the first bath.

Molded Head-due to the overlapping of the cranial bones during a vaginal birth. The baby's head may appear elongated (cone head shaped) for the first day or so and then becomes nice and round. Babies delivered by cesarean delivery may not have a molded head unless they entered the pelvis/birth canal.

Puffy face - due to pressure of the cervix and the birth canal during a vaginal delivery. Usually the puffiness diminishes in the first day.

Swollen scrotum/labia, breasts - babies received hormones from mom while in utero thus causing swelling. Female babies may even have a vaginal discharge that may be tinged with blood. The swelling should resolve within a week.

Milia - tiny white, pimple-like spots found on the baby's face; typically on the nose, cheeks or chin. These are simply clogged glands or hair follicles and should be left alone. They usually disappear in a week or so.

Lanugo Hair - fine, soft hair found on the face, shoulders, back or upper arm. This hair rubs off and can be found on clothing as well as bedding.

Cyanotic Hands/Feet - the newborn's hands and feet may appear bluish due to poor circulation to the extremities. Remember to keep the newborn warm which will help improve the circulation to the hands and feet.

Dry or Peeling Skin - due to the baby being exposed to water during the entire pregnancy and then exposed to air at birth. Avoid using lotions or oils to remedy the dryness as these may cause rashes on the newborn.

Cradle Cap - dryness and peeling of the scalp of the newborn. Baby oil applied to the scalp may help. Avoid pouring baby shampoo directly on the scalp. Lather shampoo in your hands prior to application to the scalp. If cradle cap remains for six months or more, consult your pediatrician as you may need to use an anti-dandruff shampoo.

Sucking Blister - often babies are born with a hard, callous-like spot on the upper lip if they sucked their finger in utero; or babies can develop these blisters from the friction associated with breastfeeding. These blisters should not be treated and will fall off on their own.

Newborn Rash - a.k.a. erythema toxicum-a rash occurring in 30-70% of newborns and can be found on all areas of the body except the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. No treatment is necessary. Rash will disappear within a few days.

Stork Bites - a.k.a. telangiectatic nevi-are pink spots found on the nape of the neck, nose, upper eyelids, or upper lip. They disappear usually within a year or two.

Mongolian Spots - bluish, black areas; most commonly found on the back or buttocks. Mongolian spots are more common on dark-skinned babies. Spots usually fade within a year or so.

Caput Succedaneum - pooling of tissue fluids within the skin of the scalp causing swelling which extends across suture lines of the baby's skull. Occurs as a result of sustained pressure of the baby's head on the cervix. Swelling relieves itself in three or four days.

Cephalhematoma - pooling of blood between the skull and the periosteum which does not cross the suture lines of the baby's skull. May occur as a result of sustained pressure on the bony pelvis, a vacuum extraction delivery or a difficult forceps delivery. Usually appear significantly a couple of days after the delivery and may last for about three weeks. No treatment is necessary. Bruising - babies may have bruising due to pressure on the pelvic bones during delivery or due to the use of forceps.