

Umbilical Cord Care

The first few weeks after your baby is born, you'll need to keep the stump of the umbilical cord clean and dry as it shrivels and eventually falls off.

There is no need to use alcohol on the cord; just keep it clean. Meanwhile, a quick submersion bath is fine before the cord falls off, just dry the stump afterward. Also, keep the diaper folded below the cord to keep urine from soaking it.

You may notice a few drops of blood on the diaper around the time the stump falls off; this is normal. But if the cord actively bleeds, call your baby's doctor immediately. If the stump becomes infected, it will require medical treatment.



Although cord infections are uncommon, you should contact your doctor if you notice any of the following:

- Foul-smelling yellowish discharge from the cord
- Red skin around the base of the cord
- Crying when you touch the cord or the skin next to it

The umbilical cord stump should dry and fall off by the time your baby is three weeks old. If it is still there beyond that time, a doctor's visit is needed.

Umbilical Granuloma

Sometimes instead of completely drying, the cord will form a granuloma or a small reddened mass of scar tissue that stays on the belly button after the umbilical cord has fallen off. This granuloma will drain a light-yellowish fluid. This condition will usually go away in about a week, but if not, your pediatrician may need to burn off (cauterize) the granulomatous tissue.

Umbilical Hernia

If your baby's umbilical cord area seems to push outward when she cries, she may have an umbilical hernia (</English/health-issues/conditions/abdominal/Pages/umbilical-hernia-in-children.aspx>)—a small hole in the muscular part of the abdominal wall that allows the tissue to bulge out when there is increased abdominal pressure (i.e., crying). This is not a serious condition, and it usually heals by itself in the first twelve to eighteen months. (For unknown reasons it often takes longer to heal in African American babies.)

In the unlikely event it doesn't heal by three to five years of age, the hole may need surgery (</English/health-issues/conditions/surgery/Pages/umbilical-hernia-surgery.aspx>). Don't put tape or a coin on the navel. It will not help, and it may cause a skin rash.

More Information

[Back to Top](#)

[Bathing Your Newborn \(/English/ages-stages/baby/bathing-skin-care/Pages/Bathing-Your-Newborn.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/baby/bathing-skin-care/Pages/Bathing-Your-Newborn.aspx)

[Umbilical Hernia in Children \(/English/health-issues/conditions/abdominal/Pages/umbilical-hernia-in-children.aspx\)](/English/health-issues/conditions/abdominal/Pages/umbilical-hernia-in-children.aspx)

Last Updated 12/28/2020

Source Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5 7th Edition (Copyright © 2019 American Academy of Pediatrics)

The information contained on this Web site should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.