Podcast intro and episode overview

Hi, you're listening to season four of the Baby Manual podcast, the podcast that helps new parents all over the world navigate the everyday challenges that arise when you have a young baby.

This season will help you decide which pregnancy, baby, and toddler items you actually need and which ones are a waste of time and money. I'm pulling on the knowledge of hundreds of thousands of new parents around the world, other pediatricians, doctor moms, the Academy of Pediatrics, breaking pediatric news sites, all to give you the best information and recommendations that I can, because I know how overwhelming it can be.

I am your host, a pediatrician, mom, and author, Dr. Carol Keim. Hello, welcome to the Baby Manual podcast. Today we're gonna talk all about health and hygiene products.

I'm gonna start off with some newborn things that you should have, some medications to keep on hand at home, and then a couple of things you can have for children who are ages six months and up.

So let's get started. For newborn items, a nasal bulb sucker is really nice to have. The hospital will probably give you one, at least in the U. S. We usually give out the bulb suckers at the hospitals, but those ones are typically a solid rubber that you can't see through.

So the one that I really like is the Neal Med Nasal Bulb. And you, there's two different versions of it. There's one.

Newborn hygiene essentials

That's just a regular bulb, sucker and one an attachment that's like a straw that you can actually put in your mouth and it has a filter so you don't suck in any boogies into your mouse.

And that allows you to control the amount of suction on it. They also make an electronic bulb sucker and that one was really nice to have. It's a little bit more pricey and only has one level of section but it's good amount a section.

So any of those three are good, or even all three of these. But what I like about the NealMed ones is that they're clear, so you can see inside how much mucus is in there.

You can make sure that you're getting it clean. They come apart real easily to clean the inside. And you see if it's starting to grow any mold in their.

Because the ones that get from the hospital can get moldy inside and you won't see it necessarily, and they don't come part to be cleaned. Nail clippers are good to have, and one of the scariest things for new parents is cutting their children's nails.

And so I usually just recommend regular nail clippers, not necessarily the baby ones. They do make baby one that are just a little bit smaller, but I found that it wasn't necessary.

Those tended to break more for me than the ones that were just regular nails clipper. You can also use a nail file if you're afraid to cut your baby's nails because a file won't hurt their skin.

So if your off by a little bit and your filing down more on one side or the other you can take a look in between and it's not going to hurt your babies to file their nails down.

When newborns are first born, you can also, if you want, just bite their nails or tear them off with your fingers. And that sounds kind of scary, but these can actually be a little bit more controlled sometimes than the clippers themselves.

So those are all different options for shortening your baby's nails. Babies do tend to scratch themselves, and as I've mentioned in other episodes, scratch mitts don't really stay on super well.

I do recommend cutting or filing your babies' nails whenever they're getting long. It's a good idea to have some Q-tips or cotton swabs. I like the regular ones and not the baby ones necessarily, because those baby one are made so that they can't go into their ear very far.

With the regularly cotton swab, you just have to be careful doing it, but it can get all the little creases in their ears as well as in the ear canal.

And I usually just recommend using those after your baby takes a bath to basically dry out their years, get the water out from in there so they don't get swimmer's ear.

A baby bathtub is nice to have. It's not a necessity. You can wash your baby in the sink, you can take them into the bath with you, You Can Take Them Into The Shower With You, these are all options.

Baby bathtub, is just nice because it's small, but you do have to be hands-on the entire time. Don't let them slip under the water. What's nice about those is they're angled, and so you could just have your babies sitting in there and you wash their hair a little bit more easily, because you'll have both hands available, as opposed to when you take the them in a tub with.

Baby Wash is nice and there's a couple of different brands. I like the ones that are unscented or lightly scented, so we can put some links in the show notes for you for those.

But some kind of Baby wash is good because you can use it as shampoo and body wash for your baby and it doesn't sting if it gets in their eyes. So that is one baby product I do recommend.

Some baby body lotion is good to have. And again, you should go with one that is lightly scented or unscented. The Aveeno products are really nice and gentle on the skin and great for kids that are prone to eczema.

I also really like one called Baby Magic and it just smells so good. Just smells like newborn babies. So one of those body lotions can be nice to Some washcloths are good.

While your baby's in the bathtub, if they're in a baby tub, you could take a wash cloth and dip it in warm water and lay it over their chest. And that can help them feel a little bit safer, more secure, and a bit warmer too, so they don't get as cold when the top half of their body is out of the water.

A thermometer is something that you should have before your baby is born. And the best way, or the gold standard way of checking a baby's temperature is to check rectally, which means in their bottom.

I know that can be scary for a lot of parents, but if you have a rectal thermometer, you only need to put it in a very small amount, just until that silver tip on the end is in all the way so that it's getting an accurate read.

If you don't want to do a rectal thermometer, then I recommend one that's a temporal artery thermometer. So not the infrared ones that scan their forehead, but the temporal one is one you put against their head and you sweep it across to the side into the hairline so it crosses over that temporal area which is over the temple of their heads.

And that can get a really good accurate core temperature as well. I usually don't recommend ear thermometers for little babies, even under age two. I feel like they tend to be inaccurate just because their ears are so small that they don t get in and they dont get the right angle.

And if you're not at just the angle, like pointing it towards their eyes, then you can also get a false reading with an ear thermometer.

Bathing, skin care, and laundry basics

Underarm temps are something that we do in the hospital, but they're only accurate for the first one to three days of life. And then after that point, taking the temperature under the baby's armpit is not going to be very accurate.

That's just telling you a surface temperature and not a core temperature. So I don't recommend doing that. You should also get a baby hairbrush or a comb for their hair.

You don't necessarily have to have it. you could even use your own comb if you like, but the baby airbrushes are very soft and gentle and they can help with that really fine babyhair to keep it looking nice.

And then for at home, laundry detergent. So I recommend something that is unscented and also dye free for the laundry, detergents, and the dryer sheets.

Get dryer sheet that are unsented and dye-free. Those will all be gentle on your baby's skin. You don't have to get a brand that's baby-specific. Really just any kind of unsent laundry-detergent and dryer-sheets should be good.

things you don't necessarily need. So they do sell baby shampoo and conditioner and you really don' t need those because the baby wash works as a shampoo as well and baby hair tends to be really soft and fine and they don t really need conditioner.

They sell baby towels, typically those are a square towel with one corner kind of folded down like a hood that you can put on your baby's head. I found those really difficult to get onto the baby and they usually just covered my baby face while I was putting it on and both of my kids hated that.

And it's also just kind tricky to then get them wrapped up in it. So just a regular towel is fine for your babies. You don't necessarily need baby washcloths.

Regular wash cloths get nice and soft when you use them when they're wet, so you can just get regular wash clothes. I wouldn't suggest any strongly scented products just because those can be more irritating to baby's skin.

Like I said before, no baby Q-tips. Those, you know, ones with the big cotton bulb on them, I just find them tricky to use and you cant get a good clean with them.

You don't need baby nail clippers, like I said before. And also baby powder is something that we don t use anymore. So when I was little, I remember my parents, for my younger siblings, would use baby power in the diaper.

It was really common actually up until maybe, 20-ish years ago. Then we realized that baby powders tend to get into the air and then the babies can breathe it in and it can hurt their lungs.

So we don't do baby powder anymore, just diaper cream instead. We'll talk about that a little bit more in the next section. So medications to keep on hand or things to buy at the pharmacy before your baby's born.

It's a good idea to have saline nose drops at home. Saline is super helpful for babies when they're congested or when the have boogies that just won't seem to come out of their nose.

you can just put a drop underneath their nostril. Babies who are less than a year old are obligate nose breathers, which means they only breathe through their nose.

They have to breathe though their nos. So if their nosed gets stuffy or they have too much mucus in there, it can be really hard for them to breath. And these saline drops, if you just out it under their Nostril, because they're nose-breathers they will breathe it into their Nos.

You don't have stick the thing into the Nos to get the drops in. That can make it a little easier to apply those. Some children's acetaminophen or paracetamol, if you're outside the US, also called Tylenol in the U. S., is good for babies who are less than six months of age.

The childrens and the infant brand in US are the same concentration, so I usually recommend getting the children because you get more of it. but you're also going to need a dosing syringe with that.

Temperature checks and baby grooming

The infant one comes with a syring, but the children's one doesn't. Most pharmacies, if you ask them, will just give you a Syringe for dosage. And always check with your doctor about the right dose because it is based on your baby's weight.

There's a lot of variation in baby weights, less than a year. Some vitamin D drops are recommended for actually everyone, children, babies, adults. It's a good idea to have at least 400 milligrams of vitamin d per day.

Now, if you are breastfeeding, you can take a very high dose of Vitamin D. You can takes 6,400 units per a day, and that's enough to put 400 units into your breast milk every day and then you don't necessarily need to do the vitamin drops.

But we just typically recommend for everyone to get vitamin D drops because it's usually just a single drop in oil that goes into your baby's mouth. It's very easy to give to them.

it doesn't really have any taste. So those are good to have before your babies born so you can start doing those right away. Infant tri-vitamins are optional.

Those have vitamin A, C, and D in them. What I find with those is they don't taste very good and so some babies will spit them out or make a yucky face or start to refuse to let you put them in their mouth.

And you have to give one ml of that, one milliliter. So it's a lot more than the vitamin D drops, which is just a single drop. And so that can be a little tricky.

If you are giving vitamins to your baby, don't mix it with the milk because if they only drink some of that bottle, if you're giving bottles, then they might not get the right dose of vitamins.

So you just would have to put that straight in their mouth before they eat one time. I do like infant tri-vitamins for if you're traveling or if anyone in the family is sick.

They can help boost your baby's immune system so that they don't get sick as well. So it's nice to have those on hand, but you don t necessarily have to do vitamins like the tri vitamins every day.

If you're in an area where the water does not have fluoride in it, your doctor might prescribe you some vitamins that have floraid in them. And fluorid can actually help your baby's teeth before they even come out, like while they're still developing inside their gums.

So check with your about whether you are going to need some vitamin that has fluorida or not. Those we start very early on as well, before six months of age before the have teeth.

It's good to have an anti-fungal cream on hand. I like Clotrimazole or Turbinifine. Those are my favorite two anti fungals for putting on the skin. You can try it when your baby has a fungal diaper rash.

A lot of diaper rashes will get colonized with the yeast or fungus. What that looks like is sort of a solid pinkish area with little dots around it called satellite lesions.

So if you see a rash like that with tiny dots, around the edges of it, you can try an anti-fungal cream. And if that's not enough, your doctor can give you a prescription strength one that is called Nystatin.

Home medications and supplements

But I like to just have an antifungals cream at home on hand. Also, an antibacterial cream like neosporin or bacitracin ointment is good to have at home.

And that's for if your baby gets any boils on their skin. This can sometimes happen in the diaper area. If that is not enough, then your doctor can prescribe you some mucurose oinment because that will treat all these boils.

Also if you're baby is getting recurrent boils in your diaper, you should treat anybody who is changing your babies diaper. by putting that ointment under your nails and inside the nose three times a day for the caregivers.

And then you would use the antibacterial oinment three time a days on your babies, the boils in their diaper. Some hydrocortisone cream, 1%, is sold over the counter.

And that can be nice to have on hand if your family has a history of allergies, eczema, or asthma. Because people who have that family history, their babies are more likely to get exema.

The first treatment for exima is to keep their skin really hydrated. using some thick emollients, something like Vaseline or Aquaphor after a bath on their skin can be really helpful.

And then a really moisturizing baby lotion in between throughout the day, one that's unscented, that can help to treat eczema. But if that is not enough, then you might want to try a hydrocortisone cream.

Because it is a steroid, you don't want to use too much of it. It's a very, very thin layer and not for longer than a week or two. So check with your doctor before you use hydrocortisone just to see if they would recommend that or not because it can have some adverse effects if you're using too I like to have something on hand for teething, some topical anesthetic, something like AuraGel or Anbosol can be really nice to use for when your baby is teathing.

Those only last for about an hour or two and babies can overdose on those, so you only want to just use it before they're eating if they are having trouble eating because they were in pain, or before bedtime if their having troubles sleeping because of the pain.

And you can give that Tylenol or acetaminophen or paracetamol, all the same thing. You can do that by mouth for children who are teething as well, and that can help.

It's just then a whole body treatment, but it lasts for four hours or so. Having something on hand to help with congestion is nice. Something like Vicks, Vaporub, or some essential oils that are good for breathing, like something peppermint or menthol based, are some breathing blends of oils are for that.

And you can go back to season three of this podcast, and I have an episode about upper respiratory infections, in actually the last episode of season two as well.

We talk about respiratory oils in that, so you could sometimes use the essential oils and they do work decently well. If your baby's congested, like if they have a cold, you can put that vapor rub either on their clothing or you could put it on the chest, but sometimes it kind of, it's irritating to the skin.

So putting it their clothes can help or putting on a bed where they're sleeping and then also the bottoms of their feet or on sock and put the sock on there foot so that the oil is not getting directly on to their skin That can also help when your baby gets a cold.

Anytime a baby is sick, you should call your doctor, especially if they're less than six months old. If they have a fever, You definitely need to call you doctor because there's a small chance that it could be a serious infection and they might need have some medications and or going to the hospital.

And also, if your baby has a cough, you should call your doctor before just treating at home with these things, just because babies, they don't have very strong breathing muscles to begin with.

And when they start coughing, sometimes they can stop breathing. So you need to check your Baby and you buy a doctor to make sure that they're okay to be treated at Home.

Things you don't necessarily need. I'm not a big fan of gripe water just because there's no dosing for it. Some parents give it for colic and actually Something I forgot to mention before is probiotics.

You should have some probiotic drops on hand because probiotcs are the one thing that have been shown to help with colic symptoms. And probiotacs are safe in babies.

So any probiotc is good for babies, but yeah, gripe water is not FDA regulated. There's no one formulation for it. And I find that it's just not super helpful.

Also, if you give too much of it, it might fill your baby up. And when babies are less than six months old, If they have any liquid that's not breast milk or formula, they sometimes won't eat enough during the day.

Over the long term, that can cause problems like shifts in water and salt balance, and then also a deficiency of calories. So yeah, I'm just a huge fan of the gripe water.

Benadryl is something we don't really do anymore for children and babies. It can make them not breathe as well and could potentially even make the stop breathing.

And also children who are less than three with benadril will sometimes have a paradoxical reaction where they get stimulated by it rather than being sedated by.

and it can just make them wild, make the run around when they're in that toddler phase. So I usually don't recommend Benadryl for allergies. For children that are old enough to take allergy medicines, we'll get to that in the next section for six months and up.

You don' need infant's acetaminophen, as I said, because it's the same concentration as the children's acetaminophene and just costs more.

What you can skip for newborns

You don't necessarily need homeopathic medicines. They haven't been proven to be effective. The only one that the Western medical world recognizes as being really effective is arnica, and that's good for bumps and bruises, which usually little babies are not getting.

But things like the homeopathy teething tablets or homepathic ear drops, I usually don' t recommend just because I've seen a lot of patients try them and tell me they don t really do anything for them.

and they might delay treatment that could actually be helpful. And then for the VIX vapor rub, you don't really need to get baby Vix. It's basically the same stuff.

If you're putting it on their clothing or on the bedding, then just the regular VX is totally fine. So for ages six months and up, you can have ibuprofen on hand and ibiprofin is an NSAID or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug, which means that it has anti inflammatory properties.

So it works a little bit stronger than Tylenol and it lasts for six hours. For babies that are teething, I have mixed feelings because you do need a little bit of inflammation for those teeth to actually come out.

But if they're really in a lot of pain, they are really uncomfortable, or they aren't sleeping well or eating well, then those could be good reasons to give them some ibuprofen by mouth.

And always check with your doctor on the dosing for that. Now, for this one, the infant ibiprofin in the US is a stronger concentration than the children's ibeprofine.

So I recommend getting the children's one just because around a year of age is when you're supposed to switch over anyway. And I find that the infant one, it just it's such a small amount.

Six-month-plus medicines and allergy care

A lot of it sticks in the syringe. I think you get better accurate dosing with the Children's One. So just make sure if you are giving your child ibuprofen that you double check the dose on the package when You talk to your pediatrician about how much to give to them so that they know how concentrated it is.

Some iron supplementation can be helpful for children that are ages six months and up. If they're eating either red meat or dark green vegetables every day, they probably don't need iron-supplementation.

But if they are not eating that every-day or they primarily breastfeeding or bottle-feeding still at that point, then you could start iron supplements at age six-months and-up.

And check with your doctor about that as well because there are a lot of different formulations of iron. Some are more easily absorbed than others, and there different concentrations for all of those.

So, yeah, check your with doctor before giving iron to your baby because iron overdosing is a potential risk and can be dangerous in babies. Multivitamins, I also have really mixed feelings about.

Those vitamin ACD drops or the liquid vitamin, AC where you give one ml of that. Might be helpful if your baby's not eating a big variety after age six months, but check with your doctor about that too, because if you're child is eating good variety throughout the week, if they're eating plenty of fruits and vegetables and whole grains and some meat, they probably don't need a multivitamin every day.

But yeah, always check your with doctor. And then once they are older, usually around age two to three, children become really picky eaters, and at that point they usually do need multavitamins.

But for little babies, the liquid multivitamin doesn't taste super great and they may or may not tolerate it. It might make them like some babies throw up from it because it's just pretty strong and concentrated.

So yeah, check with your doctor if you think your baby might need that. So for allergies in this age group, ages six months and up, I like the liquid claritin or Zyrtec and the generics of that are cetirizine or loratadine.

And those can be really helpful to have on hand if your family has a history of things like environmental allergies, food allergies. asthma, eczema. Because again, families with that history are more likely to have a baby that has an allergy to something.

If your baby ever shows signs of a food allergy, stop giving them that food and talk to your doctor before you reintroduce that. Food because that can be potentially very dangerous the second or third time that they have that same food.

So these are for environmental allergies. And then things that you don't need, baby aspirin is something that used to be a thing. And now we realize that aspirine is very dangerous in children, really up to age 18 years.

It can cause something called rise syndrome, where they basically have some liver failure and brain damage from it. So if your child has a viral infection and they have aspirins, it can caused that reaction and can be devastating.

You don' need baby asprin. And again, I don't recommend the infant ibuprofen. All right, so those are all the health and hygiene items that you should have on hand for your baby.

We didn't talk a lot about diapering because I have another episode just about dipering and pottying, but you can go back and check that one for the diaper related items to keep on-hand.

And next time we're going to be talking all about feeding and teething. Thanks for listening. Remember all of the links from this episode are in the show notes and you can always go to my linktree which is l-i-n-k-t-r dot e-e slash d- r- k- e i- m.

Closing remarks and next episode preview

If you know anybody who is pregnant or has a little baby tell them about this show. Maybe they would like to listen to this podcast they might find something helpful in here.

And if you know any friends who are pregnant and want to get them something for their baby shower, I would definitely recommend my book, The Baby Manual.

It's meant to be all inclusive. Really, all the questions that arise in the first year of your baby's life are in that book. So Baby manual is also linked in The Show Notes and on my link tree.

Have a wonderful day.