

Description

Not Just Skin Deep

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Teething and nappy rash

When a baby's primary teeth are erupting, from four to 36 months, common symptoms may include pain, drooling, gum-rubbing, sucking, irritability and wakefulness. These symptoms can be distressing; anyone who has cared for a teething infant will be familiar with attempting to work out how best to soothe them. There can be uncertainty about the root cause of the symptoms, which may lie outside of teething and warrant further investigation to rule out other causes of ill health.[1]

Parents and carers may notice the presence of diarrhoea during teething, which can contribute to nappy rash (nappy dermatitis). The main cause of nappy rash is prolonged skin exposure to moisture and faecal matter; when a frequent loose stool is added into the mix the infant is left vulnerable to the condition. While adding another layer of discomfort it also presents the possibility of infection as the acute inflammatory reaction compromises skin integrity.

Why skin integrity matters

Primarily, skin is the first line of defence against the physical challenges of the immediate environment. But its function does not end there. Midwives acutely understand the key role of skin-to-skin contact in the regulation of neonatal temperature, breathing and heart rate in the moments post-birth. The immediate, uninterrupted skin contact encouraged by midwives brings a myriad of health benefits to mother and baby.

One joy of being a midwife is witnessing those early hours of life, with the baby nestled on the mother's chest; the calm after the energy and deep focus of birth. The drive for maternal protection is hardwired, and the sensory function of skin contact boosts the hormonal responses that nurture that crucial parent-infant bond. Growing understanding of the role of the skin's microbiome in supporting immunity as it is colonised with maternal bacteria at birth highlights its health-preserving qualities.[2] Parents who continue with skin contact in the first weeks of life will recognise its value in bringing connection, an innate parental knowledge that supports a lasting closeness as the child grows.[3] For all its vital features, careful treatment of this special organ is a must.

Preventing nappy rash

The symptoms caused by teething can be distressing for the infant and concerning for carers, especially when the additional discomfort of nappy rash arises. Carers may rely on different methods to ease symptoms of teething, which may include pharmacological and/or natural homeopathic remedies'.[4] Homeopathic remedies are a form of energetic medicine made from plants, minerals, or animals (some of which can be toxic in their primary form). Any treatment used should consider the individual baby and symptoms observed, monitoring any reactions and responses following application.

Whether diarrhoea is present during teething or at any other time, measures should be taken to protect the skin from nappy rash. The main method of prevention is good skincare, which means frequent nappy changes and application of a barrier formulation.[5] Other factors which can contribute to effective skincare are minimising exposure to chemical irritants, considering the material of the nappy used, limiting frequency of bathing and exposing the skin to air regularly.[6]
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