

Baby Skin Care: How to Combine Science and Arts

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Recently, there have been reports about talcum powder being linked to cancer. Is talcum powder safe to use on babies? If not, what is the alternative in sweaty, humid environments?

Talcum powder is in use for babies since 1893. So far millions of babies have used it all over the world. In the index case the use of powder over genital part has been incriminated to development of ovarian carcinoma in an elderly lady in USA. This case, however, needs strict scientific documentation of its temporal correlation with adverse effect and use of powder. The ingredients injurious to health in powders are formaldehyde, 1,4-dioxane and asbestos, in babies' powders are used basically to keep the sweaty skin dry and smooth. However, we the paediatric dermatologists don't endorse the use of powders on baby's skin. This is basically because of several reasons like:

- a) Powder particles may block sweat duct pores and produce miliaria or prickly heat more
- b) Some of the ingredients of powders can cause allergy and irritation on soft baby skin
- c) On inhalation, powder can cause aspiration pneumonia or granuloma of lung (asbestosis).

In sweaty humid weather, the baby is to be given bath frequently, at least 3-4 times a day. Instead of bathing, cold sponging of the body 2-3 times a day can also be done.

Baby deodorants are also very useful because they contain alcohol/spirit which helps evaporation of sweat from skin. It can be safely sprayed over body folds. Special care to be taken regarding 'not to spray it near the face of the baby'.

What ingredients should mothers watch out for in baby products such as soaps, lotions and oils?

Mothers should be careful and see to it that the baby products like soaps, lotions and oils should be free of the following ingredients:

- A. Talc- Is irritant for baby's skin and may cause allergic rash. Moreover, if inhaled accidentally, it can produce aspiration pneumonia and asbestos granuloma on chronic inhalation.
- B. Fragrance- Is a 'strict no no' for any baby product. It causes allergy of skin known as 'contact dermatitis'
- C. Propylene Glycol: Is an ingredient in baby lotions and wipes. It is a common sensitizer for baby's skin particularly those with a tendency to develop skin and respiratory allergy (Atopic Child).
- D. 1,4-dioxane and ethylated surfactants: Is an undeclared component of baby soaps and powders often. It is carcinogenic
- E. Mineral Oil: Mineral oil is often mixed with fragrance to produce baby oil. This is not acceptable
- F. Parabens: Often an ingredient in various baby products. They are known sensitizers.

What are the indigenous home-grown solutions for baby skin care such as coconut oil, mustard oil or any other traditional remedies that keep babies' skin healthy? In the US many mothers use cornflour instead of talcum powder, for example.

Mainstream baby products contain many toxic ingredients that will enter your baby's body if used for long time without proper knowledge and monitoring. The best option is to stick with natural, nourishing, and edible ingredients such straight oils (olive, sweet

almond, coconut) and fragrance-free bar soap, although omitting soap and rinsing just with water is usually fine, too. (If you wouldn't put it in your mouth, don't use it.) Your baby may not have that stereotypical baby-powder smell, but he or she will be healthier in the long run, and that's all that matters. Baby We do not advocate massage of mustard oil on baby's skin because it is irritant, messy and unacceptable. It does not do any good to baby's skin. There is a myth that 'use of mustard oil' prevents cough and cold in baby. This concept is far from 'science'.

Can you approve the following baby skincare tips?

- A. Give baby bath 2-3 times every day in our tropical climate during summer and at least once a day during winter
- B. Take care of dirt and grime that accumulates in folds of skin
- C. Change diapers every 2-3 hours
- D. Cut nails regularly
- E. Give cotton clothes to wear as far as possible
- F. No 'antiseptic bath' routinely

Anything else you want to recommend for healthy baby skin, please suggest.

Baby's hygiene and hygiene of mother and care givers is of paramount importance. All those who handle baby must have a clean pair of hands with nails cut regularly and no infection of hands. Mother should have scientific mind and rational approach towards selecting baby care products.

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