

# How to check your baby's temperature and respiratory rate

## How to take your baby's temperature

Ideally, you need a digital thermometer to get a fast, accurate reading.



### To take your baby's temperature:

- Hold them comfortably and put the thermometer in their armpit – always use the armpit with babies
- Gently but firmly, hold their arm against their body to keep the thermometer in place until it beeps
- The display on the thermometer will then show your baby's temperature
- A normal temperature will be between 36.5 and 37.5 degrees C
- If the reading is above or below this check 'How can I check the reading is accurate' below and repeat the reading.
- Contact your midwife if your baby's temperature is above or below this

### How can I make sure the reading is accurate?

If you use a digital thermometer under your baby's armpit and follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully, you should get an accurate reading. There are a few things that can slightly alter the reading – for example, if your baby has been:

- wrapped up tightly in a blanket
- in a very warm room
- wearing a lot of clothes

If this is the case, remove some of the baby's coverings, allow them to cool down for a few minutes, but do not let them get cold, then take their temperature again to see if there is any change.

A low temperature e.g., under 36.5 degrees:

Check that the thermometer has not slipped and is in contact with the baby's skin. Repeat the reading.

### Other types of Thermometers

- You can buy other types of thermometers, but they may not be as accurate as a digital thermometer for taking a baby or small child's temperature:

- **Ear (tympanic) thermometers** – these allow you to take a temperature reading from the ear, and are quick but expensive; they can give misleading readings if you do not put them in the ear correctly, which is more likely to happen with babies because their ear holes are so small
- **Strip-type thermometers** – these are held against the forehead and are not an accurate way of taking a temperature: they show the temperature of the skin, rather than the body

**Never put any thermometer (or anything else) into your baby's anus.**

**You should never use an old-fashioned glass thermometer containing mercury to take the baby's temperature. These can break, releasing small splinters of glass and highly poisonous mercury.** They are no longer used in hospitals, and you cannot buy them in shops.

## How to count your baby's breathing rate

Babies, especially newborns, tend to breathe much faster than adults. A normal breathing rate for a baby from birth to six months old is 30-60 breaths per minute, although it could be 20 if the baby is asleep.

- Ideally count the baby's breathing when baby is quiet.
- Count and observe the baby's breathing for a full minute, as babies' breathing rate is often irregular.
- Count the baby's chest rising with each breath for a minute. You may need to do it more than once as sometimes they can breathe rapidly for a few seconds at a time.
- If it is difficult to observe your baby's breathing visually, place your warmed hand lightly across the baby's chest and count each rising movement.
- Notice if your baby is making a noise on breathing out or whether there appears to be any sucking in beneath the ribs.

Let your midwife know immediately if the baby's breathing rate is over 60 or less than 20, or if your baby appears to have any difficulty breathing.

## How to count your baby's heart rate



You can take your baby's heart rate by placing 2 fingers gently on the baby's chest. Just below the nipple line. Once you have located the heart rate, which feels like a light throbbing, you will want to time it with a timer.

Set your timer for 30 seconds and count how many pulses you feel until the timer goes off. Multiply this number by two, and you will get the baby's beats per minute, or bpm. The normal heart rate for a baby under one year old is between 100 and 160 beats per minute.

Call your midwife if the baby's heart rate is below 100 or more than 160 beats per minute.

## Information sheet for parents whose babies are at increased risk of GBS

Please contact your midwife urgently if you have any concerns, she may recommend that you go to A&E immediately

<b>Signs and symptoms of early onset Group B Strep infection in babies</b>	<b>Signs and Symptoms of late-onset Group B Strep infection in babies</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Grunting noises when breathing</li><li>• Rapid breathing Please see (How to count your baby's breathing) Info sheet</li><li>• Abnormal temperature (lower than 36°C or higher than 38°C Please see (How to take your baby's temperature) Info sheet</li><li>• Slow or fast heart rate, please see the (How to count your baby's heart rate) Info sheet</li><li>• Abnormal behaviour (for example, inconsolable crying or listlessness)</li><li>• Unusually floppy</li><li>• Developed difficulties with feeding or with tolerating feeds</li><li>• A change in skin colour.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fever</li><li>• Impaired consciousness</li><li>• Poor feeding and/or vomiting</li><li>• Fever which may include the hands and feet feeling cold, and/or diarrhoea</li><li>• Refusing feeds or vomiting</li><li>• Shrill or moaning cry or whimpering</li><li>• Floppy body</li><li>• Dislike of being handled, fretful</li><li>• Tense or bulging fontanelle (soft spot on the head)</li><li>• Involuntary body stiffening or jerking movements</li><li>• Pale and/or blotchy skin</li><li>• Blank, staring or trance-like expression</li><li>• Abnormally drowsy difficult to wake or withdrawn</li><li>• Altered breathing patterns</li><li>• Turns away from bright lights</li></ul>