

BABY'S FIRST YEAR

The first 12 months of a baby's life can be exciting for parents but every stage has its own unique challenges — and you can help them cope, says **MEGAN HAGGAN.**

► NEWBORN

The first couple of weeks after bringing Baby into the world can be stressful and confusing for many parents. If the baby is their first, the learning curve is very steep!

'I felt the lead-up to the birth was very labour-focused — we did five weeks of antenatal classes and found it quite repetitive as they kept going over and over the stages of labour and pain management,' Kendra, 32, mum to four-month-old Taya, told *Post Script*.

'A few of us said at the start of the classes that we were more concerned about what happens afterwards, but still nothing.

'Overall, my husband and I were completely unprepared for our baby, although we had purchased everything on

the checklists.

'You get shown some things in hospital such as changing and bathing, but when you get home it's like starting over again. Even getting our beautiful girl into the car capsule upon leaving hospital was traumatic, and we all ended up hot, flustered and teary.

'I wish someone had told me how hard it can be, and taught me some basics and tricks of the trade.'

Simple things like using the car capsule, sling or baby carrier, and different ways to hold or settle the baby were things parents-to-be needed to know, Kendra said.

And pharmacy is an ideal destination to offer help to these parents, she suggested.

'Pharmacies could offer some services — most have midwives on for a day or so during the week — but even some parenting talks would be great.'

Recommend: Johnson's Baby Shampoo; Aromababy Natural Alcohol Free Aromawipes; Innoxo Baby's Nappy Cream; Tommee Tippee Nappy Wrapper.

► ONE MONTH

Feeding and sleeping are the biggest issues in the first couple of months of a baby's life, said Brad Lauder, co-founder of online parenting resource The Bub Hub.





'The arrival of Baby means that a lot of new parents aren't getting much sleep,' he said.

Pharmacy assistants can be very helpful in offering advice on sleeping, Mr Lauder advised.

'But every baby is different. So you need to take the individual approach that works best for you. The advice given to the parents needs to be relevant to their situation.'

Feeding and sleeping are often tied together. As an example, Mr Lauder explained that one of his children suffered from wind as a tiny baby, but 'with all the advice we were given, nobody once mentioned gripe water.

'For the first six weeks of his life, he was taking in air when he drank breast milk, and so he had some big issues with sleeping because of the indigestion.

'Finally we heard about gripe water, we tried it and suddenly he was fine. This sort of simple solution can make such a big difference to new parents.

'In this situation, the baby would cry, so we'd feed him, believing he was still hungry, he'd get more wind and cry some more. It's so easy for mums and dads to

get confused. And it's because of situations like this that everyone gets stressed in the first month,' he said.

Feeding Baby can itself be a source of tension in these early days. Breastfeeding may be difficult — according to the Australian Breastfeeding Association, 90 per cent of mothers initiate breastfeeding, but face barriers.

A parliamentary inquiry into breastfeeding last year showed that breastfeeding rates drop off steadily after birth, and that by age one, only 23 per cent of babies are receiving any breast milk at all.

'Many mothers are surprised to find that breastfeeding can be quite challenging, but with the right advice and appropriate support it seems that many would breastfeed for longer,' the inquiry report stated.

What can pharmacy assistants do to help? According to the report, studies have shown that women breastfeed for longer if the health professionals they speak to support and encourage it.

This can mean recommending products to help with cracked nipples (don't underestimate how much these hurt!), breast pads to mop up leaking, or a breast pump. Other women may need help choosing a formula if they can't breastfeed

or want to complementary feed — and a pharmacy assistant who knows her product and supports Mum's decisions is invaluable.

Recommend: Infacol Wind Drops; Lansinoh cream; Avent Breast Pump; Pigeon Ultra-Slim Breast Pads.

▶ TWO MONTHS

'I think the first immunisation can be more traumatic for Mum and Dad than for the baby!' said Brad Lauder. 'They're concerned that it will hurt, but usually Baby doesn't notice that anything much has happened.'

'In many cases the baby's distress can be because the parents' anxiety impacts on them.'

Ann Simpson, nurse educator at Karitane Mothercraft Society, said that while some parents may like to have a children's analgesic on hand in case there's a reaction to the vaccine, if they come into the pharmacy seeking symptom relief they should be referred to the pharmacist.

'Some people find that giving the baby the needle while they're feeding helps; certainly it's a good way of comforting them afterwards, as is giving them a cuddle,' Ms Simpson said.

Generally fewer children react to the vaccines than in the past, she added. 'There are no live viruses given as vaccines anymore. The whooping cough vaccine in particular used to be a bit of a problem, but it's now man-made, so most babies don't have a reaction.'

'There are occasional reactions: there may be a raised or red lump at the site of the injection; the baby might be unhappy or crotchety for a short time afterwards. Some will want to feed more often.'

Pharmacy assistants should ask the pharmacist to talk to the parents if they come in asking about these reactions.

Recommend: Children's Panadol; Nurofen for Children (from three months).

▶ FOUR MONTHS

By four months, many babies have started rolling over. This is the beginning of a new challenge for parents — keeping Baby safe as they start wriggling around on the change table!

'For the first few months of a baby's life, you put them on the change table and change their nappy — it's easy,' said Bryce McNair, acting executive officer of Kidsafe

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN HAVING KIDS FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS BUT NOW PARENTS PUT SUCH PRESSURE ON THEMSELVES TO GET IT RIGHT

NSW. 'Then comes the time when they roll over.'

It's all downhill from here as Baby first rolls and wriggles, then by six months they may be attempting to escape from the table with a nappy half-on, oblivious to the long drop to the floor.

'This signals a stage in the baby's development when parents need to become more aware of their child's safety,' Mr McNair said. 'It can make the nappy-changing experience quite stressful.'

▶ FIVE MONTHS

The timing of teething varies from child to child, but it's around five or six months that most children start to cut their first teeth. For some babies it's a breeze; for others it can mean days of pain as teeth struggle to break through tender gums.

'Again, every baby is different, even though they may have the same parents and be raised in the same environment. For some kids teething is a big problem,' said the Bub Hub's Brad Lauder.

'You can help reassure parents by reminding them that their baby's experience doesn't have to be exactly what happened with an older sibling.'

Cooling a teething ring in the fridge (never the freezer!) or using a teething gel can be a big help.

Recommend: SM33 teething gel; Bonjela teething gel.

▶ SIX MONTHS

The Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia now recommend that babies be exclusively breastfed until the age of six months, at which point it's time to start introducing food — pureed at first, then moving towards mashed, lumpy and eventually solid foods.

'Waiting until six months gives

Baby's system a chance to mature, and doesn't take away any of the benefits of breastfeeding,' said Karitane's Ann Simpson.

She said parents could start by introducing rice cereal once a day, and then gradually include mashed vegetables and fruit. Good starter foods are quite bland and have low allergic potential: potatoes, apples and pears, for example.

'Only offer the baby one food at a time, for three to five days. This way if the baby reacts to a particular food — has a rash, diarrhoea, vomiting or trouble breathing — at least you could pinpoint that food.'

As well as jars or tins of pre-prepared baby food, pharmacies could offer cube trays for parents to make their own frozen baby meals, Ms Simpson suggested.

'If you only give a baby jarred or tinned foods when the rest of the family are having normal family foods — which is the reason for getting children into solids, to educate them to eat with the rest of the family — they're less likely to become interested in ordinary food. It gets a bit expensive, too!

'Jarred and tinned foods can be great if you're going away on holidays, or you're



caught out for fresh food and the pharmacy is open.

'The cubes are also great — you can make a bit extra and freeze it for the baby so that you've always got food on hand.'

Recommend: Farex Rice Cereal Original Mixed Cereal; Motherly Frozen Food Cubes

▶ SEVEN MONTHS

Some time around the six or seven-month mark, babies get up onto their hands and knees and get mobile. As with all these milestones, the timing varies — for some parents it's as early as five months, and they need to take keeping an eye on the baby to a new level!

'I think the best advice pharmacy assistants can give parents is to get down on the floor and have a look around,' said Kidsafe's Bryce McNair. 'You'll see things that are very worrying that you wouldn't notice otherwise.'

'This is particularly the case in the bathroom, kitchen and laundry — you need to find a way to hide anything dangerous out of reach.'

Mr McNair said that all parents of crawling babies needed a safe place to be able to put them — a cot or playpen — if they intended to turn their back even for a moment.

They also needed to consider coffee tables, which have sharp corners, he said. Furniture protectors could be useful here.

Recommend: Dreambaby Foam Edge Bumpers; Dreambaby Flexible Multi-Purpose Latches.

▶ NINE MONTHS

By nine months, many babies are pulling themselves up and standing, using the aid of a chair, table or the walls of their playpen. They may also start 'cruising' — walking along by holding onto these items of furniture for support. It's time for even greater vigilance, said Mr McNair.

'Things you take for granted can become very dangerous when there's a little child about: cleaning products and medicines in particular. A huge proportion of child poisonings are related to other people's medicines.'

According to the Return Unwanted Medicines program, 50 children are admitted to hospital every week with poisoning, in many cases due to these medicines.

'Often these medicines are on bedside tables where babies can get to them quite easily by rolling around or pulling up to stand using the table,' Mr McNair said.

Recommend: Bring unwanted medicines back to the pharmacy.

▶ TWELVE MONTHS

By now Baby is hardly a baby at all! They may be toddling around on their own, and have almost certainly said their first words.

This is a very exciting milestone for the whole family, but parents may be concerned if their child has not walked or talked by now.

If parents are concerned at all about their child's development, they should be encouraged to speak to their local Early Childhood Centre, but should also be reassured that every baby is different.

'You can't, and shouldn't, pigeonhole any one parent or child,' said the Bub Hub's Brad Lauder.

'Whether it's teething or bathing or feeding, if you look at 5,000 children, you'll see 5,000 different experiences. There may be a lot of similarity, but at the end of the day everybody is different.'

'People have been having kids for thousands of years. But these days, it's the pressure parents put on themselves to get it right that's the problem. They create a lot of anxiety that really doesn't need to be there.'

'The message is to find what works for you, and do that. If pharmacy assistants can give advice and products that help parents do just that, they can help a great deal.'

New mum Kendra said that her local pharmacy is very helpful, particularly given that Taya has reflux and is an active, strong-willed little girl.

'In return for the great service my pharmacy offers I buy absolutely everything there and recommend them to anyone that will listen,' she said.

▶ USEFUL LINKS

- www.raisingchildren.net.au
- www.bubhub.com.au
- www.breastfeeding.asn.au
- www.kidsafe.com.au
- www.karitane.com.au

**EVERY WEEK
50 CHILDREN ARE
ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL
WITH POISONING,
IN MANY CASES DUE
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