

How To Prepare for a New Baby

By Amy Kennedy

Part of the excitement of preparing for a new baby is furnishing the nursery. Choose a theme for the room, or simply use a variety of colorful accessories that you like. Essentials on your list for outfitting the nursery should include a bassinet or crib, changing table, rocking chair, chest for clothes, an infant seat, and nursery monitor.

Be careful about accepting antique or hand-me-down cribs. They may not meet Consumer Product Safety Commission standards. Bars on the bed should be no more than 2-3/8 inches apart and there should be no splinters or cracks in the wood. The mattress should adjust up and down with a height at least 26 inches away from the top railing at its highest. Corners should have no posts or knobs protruding above the rail. Make sure the mattress you use is firm and fits tightly against the crib. Bumpers lining the crib should tie securely or snap on to remain upright at all times.

A changing table that can hold diapers, wipes, cloths, lotion, powder, sponges and bath supplies is convenient. If you are short on space, use a changing mat on the floor, couch, or a bed instead and keep accessories in a basket or tote. A diaper pail with a tightly sealed cover and a filter helps control odors. You will also need a hamper or laundry bag for soiled cloths and clothing.

Monitors are a handy way to keep tabs on your child when you are in another room. They alert you instantly if baby is fussing, or give you peace of mind that your child is sleeping peacefully.

When you are decorating the nursery consider adding a mobile that can intrigue your baby with its motion and vibrant colors. Arrange a comfortable spot in the room where you can place a rocking chair or armchair for baby's feedings.

Install a child safety seat in your car that meets all federal safety standards. It should be placed in the back seat facing the rear until your child weighs 20 pounds. Then it can be positioned facing forward.

Stock up on a good supply of clothing and linens before your baby's arrival. Keep in mind that babies outgrow infant sizes quickly, so it's smart to buy a variety of sizes from newborn to three and six months so your child can grow into them. Most babies spend a lot of time in undershirts and onesies for the first few months. You will also want to have a couple of soft knit hats to keep baby's head warm. Stretch suits with snap crotches and feet come in handy for outings. Booties, socks, washcloths, towels, waterproof pads, and receiving blankets are typically items that most mothers receive at baby showers.

Crib blankets, bibs, and diapers are the items you will never seem to have enough of. A stroller and baby carrier are two essentials you should take extra care in choosing. You will be using them a lot, and they should be strong enough to stand up to frequent use, but light enough that they are easy to take along, set-up, and store.

To ensure your baby's safety while bathing, always test the water temperature. A newborn's bath water shouldn't be hotter than 85 degrees F. Always keep your eyes and one hand on the baby while giving a bath. Wrap the baby in a towel before taking him out of the tub to prevent him from slipping.

Once your baby begins crawling and walking, safety gates are very important. Avoid folding gates, which can be unsafe, and use a rigid type that attaches conveniently to walls or doorways. Gates can help prevent your baby from going into hazardous areas, protect him from stairway falls and pets, and ensure that he stays in the same room with you.

One of the hardest things new parents have to deal with is constant fatigue. Finding time for ordinary chores and getting enough sleep can be difficult. Try to arrange for a friend or relative to help out for the first week or two after you arrive home from the hospital. Choose a pediatrician before your baby is born to make sure you have someone you trust to turn to for advice and assistance when your baby is sick.

A new baby will result in many changes in your daily routine and your lifestyle. It will also have a dramatic effect on your finances. Your family may be losing the income of one parent who opts to stay home and care for the child, or you may have to cope with the added expense of childcare. Make a budget listing all the items you will need to care for the baby and be sure to include the cost of health care.