

Low-Tech Mothering - healthier, safer, cheaper and easier

Caring for a new baby is much harder and much easier than you think it's going to be. Harder, because your baby will need you much more than you realized. Easier, because many of the rituals of the bottle-feeding generations are disappearing. Here are some of the things you DON'T have to do:

LEARN YOUR BABY'S CRIES Most nursing mothers never do. At your baby's first sign of distress, offer to nurse. If that doesn't work, try something else, then offer again. Nursing solves a multitude of baby problems besides hunger.

GIVE A DAILY BATH Babies get dusty, not dirty. You'll be cleaning the only really messy part at diaper changes. Otherwise, do whatever you both enjoy. Some babies hardly ever get a bath... and they're glad. Others really like having a bath almost every day. To make bathtime even easier, get in the tub together.

SET UP A SCHEDULE Babies are flexible and portable. They sleep happily in your arms, in your lap, on the go, and they let you know when they need you. Your baby may set up his own schedule, he may not. Either way, it's bound to change, so why worry about it?

BUY BABY EQUIPMENT All she really needs is diapers, clothes, and a car seat. A nursing baby has no need for bottles, pacifiers, or a special shelf in the refrigerator. Your arms are much better company than heartbeat teddies, swings, strollers, or crib gyms. And more than one baby has slept peacefully in a laundry basket during the day and with her Mom and Dad at night.

GET UP FOR THE 2 AM FEEDING Just keep your baby nearby, in bed with you if you like, and roll over to nurse before either of you really wakes up. You'll get the hang of it with a little practice. (No, you won't roll over on him. When was the last time you fell out of bed? You'll be just as aware of your baby as you are of the edge of your bed, provided you haven't been using drugs or alcohol.)

CHANGE DIAPERS IN THE DARK One of the best-kept secrets of baby care is that you don't have to change the baby at night, if he doesn't mind being wet. If he's in cloth diapers, just "double diaper" at bedtime, and no one has to get out of bed until morning. (Of course, if he has frequent stools or a rash, you'll want to keep him clean and dry.)

FUSS WITH BABY FOODS Human milk is all a human baby is designed to have for the first half year or so. By waiting until she can sit up and finger-feed herself, you'll bypass the mess - and expense - of canned baby foods.

INVEST IN NURSING CLOTHES Most of us just wear the two-piece outfits we already own. Pull the hem up on one side to nurse; the baby covers any bare spots. For nighttime, try a gown with buttons down the front, or a short top.

What your baby does need is you and your arms. The substitutes are high-priced. The original is priceless.

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