



# Baby Check

is your baby  
really ill?



## how Baby Check works

Baby Check will help you decide whether your baby needs a doctor. Baby Check contains 19 simple checks which test for different symptoms or signs of illness. Each check has a score. Go through all the checks, then add up the scores. The higher the score the sicker the baby is likely to be.

### if your baby:-

- stops breathing or goes blue
- has a fit
- cannot be woken
- is unresponsive and not aware of what is going on
- has glazed eyes and is not focussing on anything
- has been badly or seriously injured
- has a rash that does not fade when pressed with a glass

**do not use Baby Check.**

**These conditions require urgent medical help.**

**see page 14 if you think your baby is seriously ill**

## how to use Baby Check

Read the booklet and try the checks when your baby is well. You will then find it easier to use if you are worried about your baby. If there are any checks you don't understand talk to your health visitor, midwife or doctor.

### when you want to check your baby:-

- undress your baby in a warm place
- carefully follow the instructions for each check
- write down the scores using the foldout score sheet on page 13
- only score if a check is obvious. If in doubt, don't score
- after doing all 19 checks, add up the scores
- page 13 tells you what the total score means

## 01 unusual cry

You will know your baby's usual cries from hunger or tiredness. An unusual cry could be: weak, high-pitched, moaning or painful.

If your baby has an unusual cry

score 2



## 02 fluids taken

Think about the amount of fluid your baby usually takes in 24 hours (do not include solids). Then think about the amount of fluid he or she has actually taken in the last 24 hours. If you are breast feeding you will know for how long your baby usually feeds, and whether your baby is sucking normally. Judge how much your baby is taking.

If your baby has taken a little less fluid than usual

score 3

or

If your baby has taken about half as much fluid as usual

score 4

or

If your baby has taken very little fluid

score 9

## 03 vomiting (being sick)

Most vomiting is not important. Healthy babies often bring back small amounts of milk after a feed. This check is about whether your baby has started vomiting large amounts after several feeds in a row.

If your baby has vomited at least half the feed after every one of the last three feeds

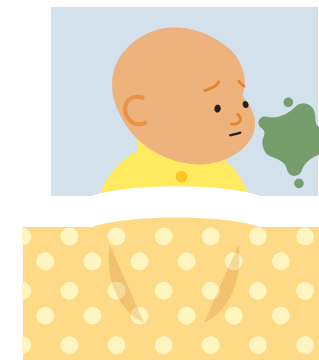
score 4

## 04 green vomit

Vomit is green when it contains bile. Bile is a bright green liquid which comes from below the stomach. Green vomit may be a sign of obstruction in the intestine. It is unlike any other vomit.

If your baby has had green vomit

score 13



## 05 wet nappies

Think about how wet your baby's nappies usually are. This will give you an idea of how much urine he or she usually passes.

If your baby has passed less urine than usual

**score 3**



## 06 blood in a nappy

You may find small flecks of blood in your baby's dirty nappy. This is usually due to a tiny split at the opening to the back passage and is not serious.

A large amount of obvious blood may be serious. It could be the result of a blockage or damage to the bowel.

If there has been a large amount of obvious blood in your baby's nappy (not just a streak on the stool)

**score 11**

## 07 drowsiness

Babies are usually very alert when awake and respond to what is going on around them. An ill baby may be drowsy at times. This check is not about the time your baby has been asleep nor whether he or she has been irritable.

If your baby has been drowsy and less alert than usual when awake score as follows:

Occasionally drowsy

**score 3**

or

Drowsy most of the time

**score 5**

## 08 floppiness

You will know how strong and firm your baby usually is.

If your baby seems more floppy than usual

**score 4**



## 09 watching

Talk to your baby. Normally babies look at you intently. Is he or she watching your face now?

This check may be difficult if your baby is crying or irritable, but your baby should watch you between cries.

**If your baby is watching you less than usual** **score 4**

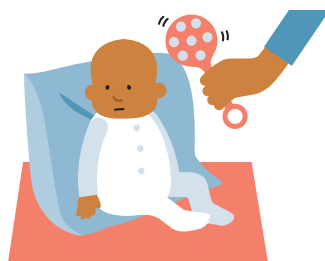


## 10 awareness

Healthy babies are aware and respond to what is going on around them. Watch your baby now. Is he or she responding to what is going on?

This check may be difficult if your baby is irritable or crying, but he or she should still be aware and responsive between cries.

**If your baby is responding less than usual to what is going on around** **score 5**



## 11 difficulty breathing in

Healthy babies breathe easily and shallowly. If a baby has breathing difficulty the lower chest and upper tummy will dip in with each breath. This is called "indrawing". This occurs in well babies when they hiccough or cry hard.

When the baby is quiet, watch the lower chest and upper tummy. The picture shows you where to look.

**If there is indrawing just visible with each breath** **score 4**

or

**If there is obvious or deep indrawing with each breath** **score 15**



## 12 looking pale

Most babies are naturally pale. What's important here is whether most of your baby's body is much paler than usual.

If your baby's body is much paler than usual **score 3**

or

If your baby has had an episode of going very pale at any time during the last 24 hours **score 3**

## 13 wheezing

Babies often make snuffly or throaty noises when they breathe. Wheezing is different. It makes a whistling noise when a baby is having difficulty breathing out.

If your baby is wheezing when breathing out **score 3**



## 14 blue nails

Healthy babies' fingernails and toenails are usually pink. Compare your baby's nails to the natural colour of your own fingernails.

If your baby's nails are blue **score 3**



## 15 circulation

This check is about how well the blood is getting to your baby's fingers and toes. Gently squeeze his or her big toe to make it white. This will not hurt your baby. Then let go and wait three seconds. Watch how quickly the colour returns.

If your baby's toe was completely white before the squeeze **score 3**

or

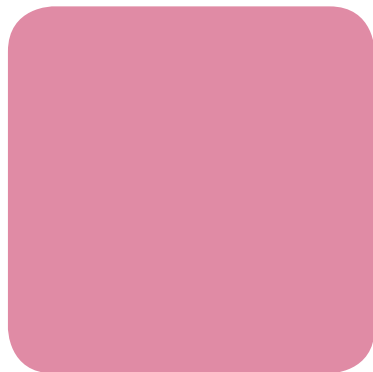
If your baby's toe colour does not return within three seconds **score 3**

## 16 rash

Babies often have a few spots or small areas of rash. This check is about a rash which covers a large part of your baby's body, or which is raw or weeping.

**If your baby has a rash which covers a large part of the body**

**score 4**



**Or if your baby has a rash which is raw or weeping and is bigger than the shaded area shown**

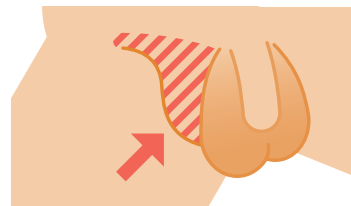
**score 4**

## 17 hernia

A hernia is caused by a small loop of intestine bulging through the muscles in the groin. In boys a hernia shows as an obvious bulge in the groin or scrotum, as shown by the arrow in the picture. It is very rare for a girl to have a hernia. A hernia gets bigger when the baby cries and it may disappear when the baby is quiet or asleep. The shaded groin area on the picture shows you where to look for a hernia. A hernia can appear on either side of the groin.

**If there is a bulge in the groin or scrotum which gets bigger with crying**

**score 13**



## 18 temperature

Babies often develop high temperatures when they are unwell. Your baby's temperature measurement may depend on where you measure it (ear, mouth, armpit) and what type of thermometer you use. It is important to follow accurately the instructions that come with your thermometer. For babies below four weeks of age use an electronic thermometer in the armpit. For babies above four weeks use an electronic or chemical dot thermometer in the armpit or an infrared tympanic thermometer in the ear.

**In a baby below three months, if the temperature is 38.0°C or more**

**score 4**

or

**In a baby above three months, if the temperature is 39.0°C or more**

**score 4**





# 19 crying during checks

This check is about how much your baby has cried *during* the checks.

If your baby has cried during the checks (more than a little grizzle)

**score 3**

## Now add up all the scores to get the total score

### What the total score means

**score 0 to 7** Your baby is only a little unwell, and medical attention should not be necessary.

**score 8 to 12** Your baby is unwell, but is unlikely to be seriously ill. You may want advice from your doctor, health visitor or midwife.

**score 13 to 19** Your baby is ill. Contact your doctor and arrange for your baby to be seen.

**score 20+** Your baby may be seriously ill and should be seen by a doctor straight away.

If you think your baby is ill watch him or her closely, if you think he or she is getting worse, do all the checks again.

### Add up your baby's score here

Date ..... Time .....

Check	Score	Check	Score
01 unusual cry	.....	11 difficulty breathing in	.....
02 fluids taken	.....	12 looking pale	.....
03 vomiting (being sick)	.....	13 wheezing	.....
04 green vomit	.....	14 blue nails	.....
05 wet nappies	.....	15 circulation	.....
06 blood in a nappy	.....	16 rash	.....
07 drowsiness	.....	17 hernia	.....
08 floppiness	.....	18 temperature	.....
09 watching	.....	19 crying during checks	.....
10 awareness	.....	<b>total score</b>	<input type="text"/>



## What the total score means

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**score 8 to 12** Your baby is unwell, but is unlikely to be seriously ill. You may want advice from your doctor, health visitor or midwife.

**score 13 to 19** Your baby is ill. Contact your doctor and arrange for your baby to be seen.

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If you think your baby is ill watch him or her closely, if you think he or she is getting worse, do all the checks again.

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## conditions with a low score which may need medical attention:

Babies sometimes develop problems such as thrush, sticky eyes, or lumps or swellings. Although rarely serious these conditions may still need medical attention. You should ask your health centre about them.

## if you are still worried:

Baby Check is not meant to replace your own judgement. You know your baby better than anyone. If your baby's total score is low but you are still worried, ask your health visitor, midwife or doctor for advice.

## if you think your baby is getting worse:

Do the checks again, and if the score is different, follow the advice for the new score.

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## if you think your baby is seriously ill:

Phone your doctor. If you get an answerphone message, call the number given on the message or call NHS 111. If you can't make a phone call, take your baby to the Accident and Emergency (Casualty) Department at the nearest hospital which deals with children.

## if you think your baby's life is in danger:

Telephone 999. Ask for the ambulance service and say it is for a baby. You do not need to pay for any 999 calls (so they can be made from mobile phones without any credit).

Very, very rarely babies die suddenly with no signs of illness. Baby Check is not designed to pick out such babies. Baby Check is a guide to help you decide how well your baby is. Although it is accurate most of the time, its advice cannot be guaranteed. If you are still worried about your baby, consult a doctor.

## background to baby check:

Baby Check was developed from a 4-year project which analysed the signs and symptoms of illness in over 1,000 babies under 6 months of age. There were 300 well babies at home and 700 babies in hospital with a variety of illnesses. All the signs and symptoms were analysed to find the combination which could be used to assess the severity of a baby's illness with the most accuracy. The 19 signs and symptoms now used in Baby Check were found to give the most accurate assessment.

The accuracy and acceptability of Baby Check has been tested in several field trials.

## acknowledgements:

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The text about temperature on page 11 has been changed from the advice given in the original Baby Check booklet and now complies with current National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines.

Baby Check is available to download from The Lullaby Trust website [www.lullabytrust.org.uk](http://www.lullabytrust.org.uk)

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## The Lullaby Trust

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