

Your First Hours — *What to Expect After Birth*



A warm, honest guide to those first precious and overwhelming moments

Nobody tells you what the first hours actually feel like. You've prepared for the birth — but the moments after can catch you completely off guard. This guide is here to help you know what's coming, what's normal, and what questions to ask before you leave the hospital.

WHAT HAPPENS — HOUR BY HOUR

0-10 mins

The Golden Hour begins

Baby is placed on your chest — skin to skin. This is the most important thing in the first hour. Delay all non-urgent procedures. This is yours.

10-60 mins

First feed

Baby is often alert and rooting in this window. This is the best time for a first breastfeeding. Even a few drops of colostrum matters enormously.

1-2 hours

Newborn checks

Weight, measurements, vitamin K, heel prick (timing varies). You can request these happen while baby is on your chest or after skin to skin.

2-4 hours

Recovery & settling

You may move to a recovery room or postnatal ward. Baby may sleep deeply after the effort of birth. Feed on demand when they wake and show cues.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM BABY

- **Vernix:** White waxy coating on the skin — do not wipe it off. It is moisturising and protective and absorbs naturally
- **Colour:** May be blue/purple at first, becoming pink quickly. Hands and feet may stay blue for hours — this is normal
- **Breathing:** May sound irregular, fast, or grunty in the first hour. Newborns breathe at 40-60 breaths per minute — much faster than adults. Do not be afraid to ask questions or raise concerns with your nurse at any point
- **Crying:** The first cry clears fluid from the lungs — it is a good sign. After that, baby may be calm and alert
- **Head shape:** May be cone-shaped from delivery — this resolves within days. Completely normal
- **Eyes:** May be puffy and swollen. Vision is blurry — baby can see about 8-12 inches, which is exactly the distance to your face while feeding

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM YOUR BODY

- **Shaking:** Very common immediately after birth — especially after an epidural or cesarean. It is adrenaline and completely normal
- **Placenta:** Delivered within 30-60 minutes of baby. You may feel pressure and a contraction. This is managed by your midwife or OB
- **Stitches:** If needed, these are done while baby is on your chest. Local anaesthetic is used. Ask for skin to skin to continue during this time
- **Bleeding (lochia):** Begins immediately — heavy red bleeding is normal. You will be given pads. Soaking more than one pad per hour — tell your nurse or doctor immediately
- **Colostrum:** Your first milk — thick, yellow and incredibly concentrated. Even 1-2ml is liquid gold for your baby in those first hours
- **Emotions:** Everything at once — relief, love, shock, overwhelm, tears. There is no right way to feel. All of it is valid

THE GOLDEN HOUR — WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT TO ASK FOR

A gentle note: Please do not feel guilty if the golden hour does not look the way you imagined. If you had an emergency cesarean, a complicated delivery, or simply were not feeling your best — this is a guide, not a rule. Skin to skin and that first connection can happen in hour two, hour six, or day two. What matters is you and your baby, not a timeline. Every birth is different and every beginning is valid. ♡

- **Skin to skin:** Regulates baby's temperature, heart rate and blood sugar. Releases oxytocin in both of you. Supports breastfeeding initiation
- **Delayed cord clamping:** Waiting 1-3 minutes before clamping allows up to 30% more blood volume to transfer to baby. Ask for this in your birth plan
- **First feed timing:** The first hour is when baby is most alert and instinctive. Do not wait — offer the breast as soon as baby shows rooting cues
- **Keep visitors away:** The golden hour is yours. You do not owe anyone access to this moment. It is okay to ask people to wait outside
- **Non-urgent procedures:** Weighing, measuring and bathing can wait. Ask your care team to delay anything non-urgent until after the first hour
- **Photos:** Ask someone else to take them — your hands should be on your baby, not your phone

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE HOSPITAL

- Is my baby latching well — can someone check before we go home?
- What are the signs feeding is going well — wet diapers, weight, contentment?
- When should we see the pediatrician and what should we watch for?
- What are the signs of jaundice and when should I be concerned?
- What should I watch for with my own recovery — bleeding, pain, emotions?
- Who do I call if I have a question at 3am once we are home?

"The first hours after birth are yours. You do not have to share them, rush them or perform them for anyone. Take your time, hold your baby, and know that you are already doing everything right. ♡"

— Chelsea · hello@confidentbabysleepco.com · confidentbabysleepco.com · Confident Baby Sleep Co.