



Newborn Screening Tests

Shortly after your baby is born, the hospital will perform tests that can catch some potentially serious problems. Your baby will be weighed, measured and cleaned and her body temperature will be checked. Before you leave the hospital, your doctor will order a routine blood test and do a physical exam.

Apgar Test

An Apgar test is given to all newborns one minute after birth and again at five minutes after birth. Activity, color, reflexes and all vital signs (including heart and breathing rates) are checked immediately after birth and scored. After five minutes, the same things are checked again and scored. The top score of 10 means the heart rate is more than 100 beats per minute, the baby is breathing, crying and moving vigorously, she coughs or sneezes in response to a tube placed into her nostril and has normal skin color, including on her hands and feet. The scoring system helps the doctor determine your baby's general health. Most healthy infants score between 7 and 9. Infants with scores of 4 or less need immediate assistance with their breathing.

Baby's First Physical

Your baby should have one complete physical exam within 24 hours of birth. This should be followed up before you leave the hospital or within two to three days after going home. The doctor will look for signs of jaundice, birth injuries, any anatomical abnormalities and coughing or respiratory distress. The umbilical cord will be examined. These early exams are a good time for you to ask questions and relieve any worries you may have about your newborn.

Blood Tests

After birth, a small sample of blood is taken by a prick to your baby's heel. Blood tests are done for phenylketonuria (PKU), which, if left untreated, can cause severe mental retardation by the first birthday; galactosemia, which damages the brain, liver and eyes; hypothyroidism, which, if left untreated, can cause short stature and mental retardation. A repeat of the blood test may be done before your baby is 3 weeks old.

In Addition

All babies are born deficient in Vitamin K, which is necessary for normal blood clotting. Your newborn may be given an injection of Vitamin K to prevent excessive bleeding. Newborns are also very susceptible to eye infections that can be contracted from passing through the birth canal. To prevent this, your newborn will be given antibiotic eye drops or silver nitrate ointment.

