

What Do We Do Now?

Tips for Parents Adopting Internationally

By Marybeth Lambe, MD in *Adoption Magazine*

- **Appeal to your baby's senses.** Hold off washing the outfit he came home in, and keep it near him in the crib. Newborns are very sensitive to smell and can be comforted by a familiar aroma.
- **Avoid excessive eye contact.** Even a newborn will let you know when it's too much—he'll look away, close his eyes or fuss. Give him time.
- **Speak quietly and move with a gentle motion.** Most infants will startle at sudden movement.
- **Leave the room as little as possible.** If you can, stay in the hotel room, rest, and hold your baby or rock or croon to him—these early moments of bonding are priceless. Try to avoid distracting visitors, noise or commotion.
- **Snuggle up.** Hold your infant as much as possible to facilitate bonding. A baby cannot be spoiled by too much holding time. Consider a baby sling or front carrier; most infants prefer being securely swaddled. Like a baby kangaroo, your child will benefit from close contact.
- **Be patient with yourself, your spouse and your infant.** Caring for a new baby in a hotel room in a strange city is exhausting. Give yourselves the gift of patience while you adjust.
- **Know your doctor beforehand.** You will have many questions during your first few days with your baby. So be sure, before your baby comes home, that you have a medical provider you can trust, one who will take your calls from the city where you meet your baby. (*See below for how to find an adoption-sensitive doctor.*)

Putting a diaper on backwards, fumbling with bottles and nipples, holding a slippery baby in bath water—these are common struggles in the first days of parenthood. Relax. You will make many mistakes throughout your child's life. He will grow and thrive and love you in spite of them.

Finding an Adoption-Sensitive Pediatrician

Choosing a doctor is a big decision for any family, and the choice is especially important to adoptive families. There are several steps you can take to make your choice a good one.

Begin by asking your friends, neighbors, adoption support group members and adoption agency for recommendations. With names in hand, check with the American Academy of Pediatrics to find out which doctors are board-certified.

Schedule a short visit to meet the potential doctor (as well as his office staff), and ask some or all of the following questions:

1. What is your philosophy about antibiotics?
2. What is your philosophy about vaccinations and immunizations?
3. Do you have daily phone-in hours?
4. Who covers for you when you are on vacation?
5. How do you feel about raising a child as a vegetarian?
6. What is the average wait for well-baby appointments?
7. To whom do you refer children who are developmentally delayed?
8. Describe your medical training and special areas of interest.

Once your baby is at home, make sure that the proper post-adoptive screening is carried out upon your child's arrival home.

- **Disease screens:** Review risks of sexually transmitted diseases as well as blood-borne pathogens. Screen for hepatitis B surface antigen, hepatitis B surface antibody and hepatitis B core antibody. Test for syphilis, hepatitis C and HIV.
- **Stool examination:** For ova and parasites, giardia antigen and bacterial culture. Three specimens, obtained 48 hours apart are strongly recommended.
- **Blood count:** Hemoglobin electrophoresis is recommended for children who are anemic and at risk for abnormal hemoglobins—those of African, Asian or Mediterranean descent.
- **Lead level testing**
- **Metabolic screen:** Include thyroid testing (TSH).
- **Tuberculosis testing (PPD):** A test of 10 mm is considered positive for children adopted internationally. Prior BCG immunization is not a contraindication for TB testing and results should be read as if no BCG had been given.
- **Urinalysis**
- **Immunization check:** Validate immunizations for children adopted domestically. For those adopted internationally, most immunizations can be repeated without harm.
- **Evaluation of development**
- **Vision and hearing screening**
- **Repeat testing:** Six months after arrival in the US, children adopted internationally should have repeat testing for hepatitis B and C, HIV and TB (with a repeat PPD test).
- **Developmental milestones:** You'll want to know that your child is reaching developmental milestones at the appropriate times. In adoptions where no genetic history is available, you'll want a medical professional with first-rate diagnostic skills to focus on areas of possible concern. At Cottonwood Pediatrics, we check all children, whether adopted or not, for appropriate developmental milestones.