

## SOAP, PERFUMERY AND COSMETICS

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### The Natural Guide to Child Care

I was impressed with a lecture that was given at the SCS Postgraduate Course in Cosmetic Science last week, because not only was it very clever, brilliantly presented and totally absorbing, but it inspired this month's column.

The expectation of a new baby is always portrayed as a pleasurable event, nine months of nest building and everyone taking special attention of the mother-to-be. In reality, it is almost a year of not drinking, not smoking, nausea and total discomfort.

The great day arrives, and after being drugged with gas, epidurals and a whole sequence of breathing exercises that would impress a Yen Buddhist to relieve the pain, you are presented with a wrinkled up little monkey.

Almost immediately it starts crying. Get used to this racket, because it is going to be a feature of life for years to come. The hospital will put a plastic band on the wrist of this infant, do not make the fatal mistake of taking it off (which will require a strong pair of snippers). It will make a useful restraint and even comes with convenient nail holes for securing the child to the wall or any other solid surface.

Feeding is usually a nightmare, and going back to nature means a woman having the most sensitive parts of her body gummed raw. In these cases a cold compress combined with a cooling gel of aloe vera and honey will help repair these ravages and not poison your new baby when it comes to the next feeding time (and they can eat for most of the day and night). In days of old there were many local remedies for sore nipples, such as Nipplewort (*Lapsana communis*), Squaw Vine (*Mitchella repens*), Self Heal (*Prunella vulgaris*) and Indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*).

Bath time is not like it is in the *Waltons* and *Little House on the Prairie* and the comment "we want to be there" made me chuckle. The appearance of the 'no tears' shampoo is received with the same enthusiasm as a bottle of concentrated sulphuric acid. The toddler screams, shouts, has an almighty tantrum and wriggles and fights like a banshee. There is a plastic ring that can be purchased to fit round the child's head to prevent the non-stinging shampoo from going in the baby's eyes, this is also perceived as another torture and will lead to further struggles. We gave up in the end, turned the shower on full, grabbed the child by the throat and tipped most of the bottle onto the hair and scrubbed.

By this time the child is hungry again and so requires feeding. As we all know, what goes in one

end usually comes out of the other. All that effort cleansing and perfuming lasts about half an hour and one is back to square one, and if you are really lucky, the baby will throw up the entire contents of its last dinner all over its 'babygro' for good measure.

In the old days we had terry towelling nappies, very environmentally friendly, but not a patch on the modern disposal, which is a feat of paper science and engineering technology. Nappy rash or diaper urticaria is far less common than in those early days, but still the old remedy remains unbeaten. A blend of zinc oxide and Castor oil (*Ricinus communis*) is still a very good healing and waterproof barrier, which can be further improved by the addition of German Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) to reduce any inflammation and soreness.

It is about this time that the child, having run out of ways to attract attention develops colic, a trapped wind and intestinal condition that does not respond to patting the baby on the back, bouncing it up and down, or playing dreary songs to it. In the old days we had a marvellous panacea called "gripe water", which was a mixture of carminatives, namely fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), Dill (*Anethum vulgare*), a little Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) and the most important ingredient alcohol. This used to work a treat, and baby used to sail off to sleep within minutes of being given two or three good spoonfuls of this mixture. Curse the person who banned it, because it was a wonderful remedy.

Another problem with the developing child is teething and the modern remedy is to dose the child up with 'Calpol' (which is full of paracetamol). I found an African remedy that was just as appealing, namely to blend the leaf juice of Leopard Lily (*Sansevieria* sp) with the juice expressed from an edible snail. In the very early days, the baby would be given a root of mallow (*Althaea officinalis*) to chew, which would seem to be more sensible. Another root that was given to chew was *Iris pallida* or Pale Iris, known by the Latin prescription *Rhizoma iridis pro infantibus*. Roman Chamomile (*Anthemis nobilis*) tea is also frequently cited. One of the best remedies is to place a small drop of lavender (*Lavandula officinalis*) oil on their pillow or on a handkerchief by their head.

Colds and congestion respond well to preparations containing camphor, wintergreen and eucalyptus, and modern science has not seemed to find anything that works better than good old-fashioned Vick.

Perhaps we nurture and coddle our offspring with too much attention, perhaps we should take a little more of a Victorian attitude towards them and 'let them be seen but not heard'. However, in today's environment, where we have children by the brace rather than by the dozen, perhaps I can understand why they are so precious and why we tend to spoil them and spare the rod. If my own grandchild is anything to go by, I can put up with any number of tantrums, shouting fits and restless night for that one glorious kiss or hug.

