

## Q What are sweeps, and should I have them?

**A** Dr Shazia Malik, Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at The Portland Hospital for Women and Children

Also called a membrane or cervical sweep (sometimes you will also hear 'stretch and sweep'), a sweep is an internal examination, usually performed after your due date by your midwife or obstetrician, that involves inserting a gloved, lubricated finger inside the cervix and separating the membranes of the amniotic sac from the cervix wall. This is done in a sweeping motion, hence the name.

The process releases prostaglandins, which are hormones that help to induce labour. By doing a sweep (or two!) the hope is that labour will then start naturally and prevent the need for a medical induction if you are over 41 weeks, or have another condition that requires the delivery of your baby.

A sweep can take up to 48 hours to have an effect, but if nothing happens, it can be repeated three days later.

Having a sweep can be uncomfortable – although most women tolerate it very well. You can get a little bit of bleeding or a few hours of tightening afterwards – and then it all stops! But often the pains can lead to proper labour coming on. Heavy bleeding is uncommon (usually just what we call a bloody show or mucus plug), but if you are worried, you must call the hospital.



## Q How can I spot threadworms, and how can they be treated?

**A** Dr Andrew Raffles, Consultant Paediatrician at The Portland Hospital for Women and Children

How many parents have been woken up in the middle of the night by a small child saying: "Mummy/Daddy, I can't sleep, I've got an itchy, sore bottom!" And the cause in 90% of children is threadworms, also known as pinworms.

Threadworms are worms that infect our intestines. They are very small (between 2mm and 13mm long), and if you look carefully at the anus of a child complaining of a sore bottom, or in the poo, they appear like pieces of fine white cotton thread – which wriggle! They live on the contents of our gut and come out of our bottoms to lay their eggs. These cause itching, which children scratch at. They then put their fingers in their mouth, so the eggs are swallowed and activated by digestive juices in the upper bowel to hatch out in the large bowel.

Your child may have trouble sleeping because of the itchiness, feel irritable or go off their food because the threadworms in the tummy can cause pain and discomfort if the infection is very severe. They are itchy, and a nuisance, but they are harmless and can be easily treated with oral medicine called mebendazole, which can be bought over the counter. You can reduce the risk of developing symptoms, and even avoid infection, by following simple personal and family hygiene tips.

Clean around your child's bottom in the morning to wash away any eggs laid during the night. Remind them to wash their hands after visiting the toilet; children often forget and go on to share toys and play closely with others so they pass it on through skin-to-skin contact. Some doctors also advise regularly vacuuming your house and thoroughly washing your bathroom and kitchen to eradicate any eggs that may be attached to dust.

If you or your child has threadworms, it is recommended that everyone in your household should be treated to reduce the risk of the infection spreading.



# Ask

*Expert advice for pregnancy, baby health, child health and development*

## Q What should I do if my child suffers a burn?

**A** Jenni Dunman, founder of Daisy First Aid

There are so many ways a child could sustain a burn. Hot fluids, ovens, irons, hair straighteners, chemical or electrical burns and sunburn are just a few, and all more common than you may think.

The good news is they are all treated in the same way: with water. As soon as a child suffers a burn, you need to put the affected area under cool, running water for at least 10 minutes, or until the pain is relieved. This will be more comfortable for the child if the water is cool rather than freezing cold.

If there is no water available you can use any cold, harmless liquid such as milk or other drinks. If you can, gently remove any clothing on the burn, but if it is stuck, leave it alone. Once the burn is cool, cover it with cling film or a clean plastic bag to prevent infection.

You must seek medical advice if the burn is any one of the following:

- on hands, feet, face or genitals
- larger than the size of the casualty's hand
- is a deep, open burn.

It is very important not to:

- pop blisters
- apply plasters or any other sticky or fluffy dressings
- use any lotions or potions
- listen to any old wives' tales – butter should not be used under any circumstance.

Chemical burns are treated with water exactly the same way, except the cooling time should be doubled to at least 20 minutes.

If your child has suffered an electrical burn, do not touch the child until they are removed from the electricity or it is switched off. There may be an entry point burn and an exit burn where the electricity has travelled through the body. Cool the burns with water for a least 10 minutes, and always call for emergency help as there may be hidden internal injuries. [daisyfirstaid.com](http://daisyfirstaid.com)



## Q Mornings have become mayhem at home. I end up screaming at the children, nagging and making wild threats, which leaves me feeling guilty and the children very upset too. How can I make the morning routine calmer?

**A** Melissa Hood, founder of The Parent Practice, London

Mornings can be hellish for lots of us. The children seem to be deliberately obstructive, but they're not – they just have a different agenda. There are lots of techniques you can use to make your children more amenable to following your instructions.

Firstly, acknowledge how it feels for your child when they have to stop doing what they want. Use a phrase like: "You wish you could sort out your football cards now, don't you? You love those cards," and only then move on to what needs to be done. Make it inclusive and give them a sense of autonomy in the situation: "Do you think there will be time to play with them once you're dressed?"

When parents nag, criticise and threaten, children rapidly tend to tune out. One of the reasons we lose our cool in the mornings and yell is that we feel rushed. Getting up even 15 minutes earlier to get yourself ready first, and doing more to prepare the night before (schoolbags, PE kits and packed lunches can all be prepared in advance) are the two solutions that most parents think are the most effective.

There's nothing like positive attention and approval to keep children motivated and on-task. Give lots of descriptive praise for small steps in the right direction: "You looked at your list. Good strategy – that way, I bet you'll motor through your jobs." It will make all the difference. [theparentpractice.com](http://theparentpractice.com)