

Adjusting skin tones in Photoshop

A common question I get seen asked is about how to adjust skin tones in a photo. This can be anything from someone coming out looking a bit overly red to hiding a rash that isn't normally there.

There are many ways to fix these things but the method I will show you is simple and fast. A few adjustment layers with some masking can fix all sorts of issues like these in no time at all.

The most common people to ask this question are people photographing newborns. The Reason for this is that newborns often have bruising or skin discolouration when they first arrive in the world. While some people happily include such things in there photographs, others prefer to hide them. Because of this, this tutorial will use a new born picture to demonstrate this technique. The picture is owned by 'New Beginnings Photography' and you can find her on Flickr [here](#).

For this tutorial you will already need to understand:

- [Layers and masks](#)
- [Adjustment layers](#)

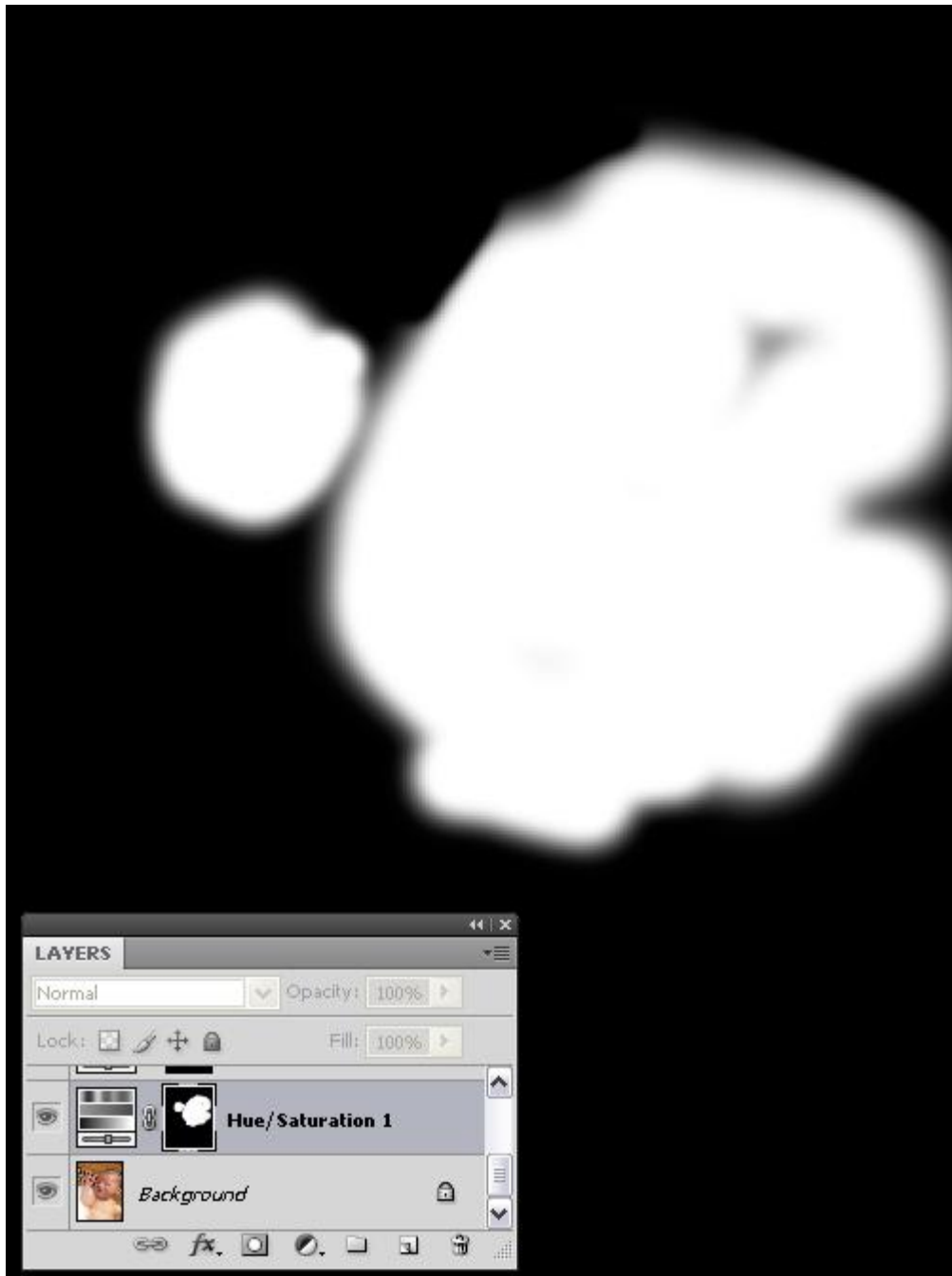
In this picture the baby has had some bruising to the face during delivery. This has caused it to go very red and also dark in comparison to the rest of its skin tones. The idea here is to use adjustment layers and masks to make the face match the rest of the body.



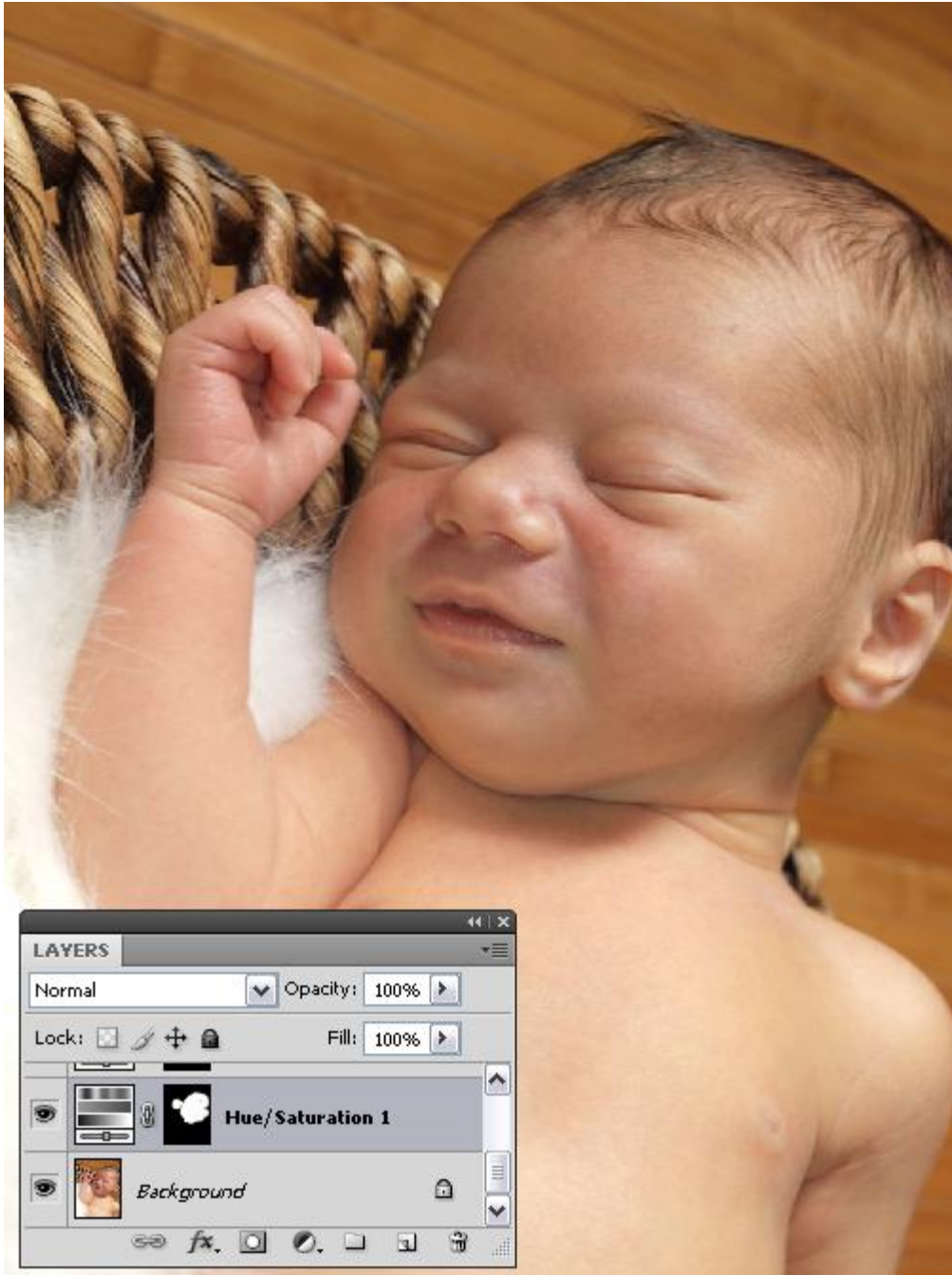
The first step here is to add a Hue/Saturation adjustment layer above the photo layer. Change the Colours from 'Master' to 'Reds' using the drop down menu. Then set the Hue to +6 and the Saturation to -6. This has shifted the reds in the image to become more yellow.



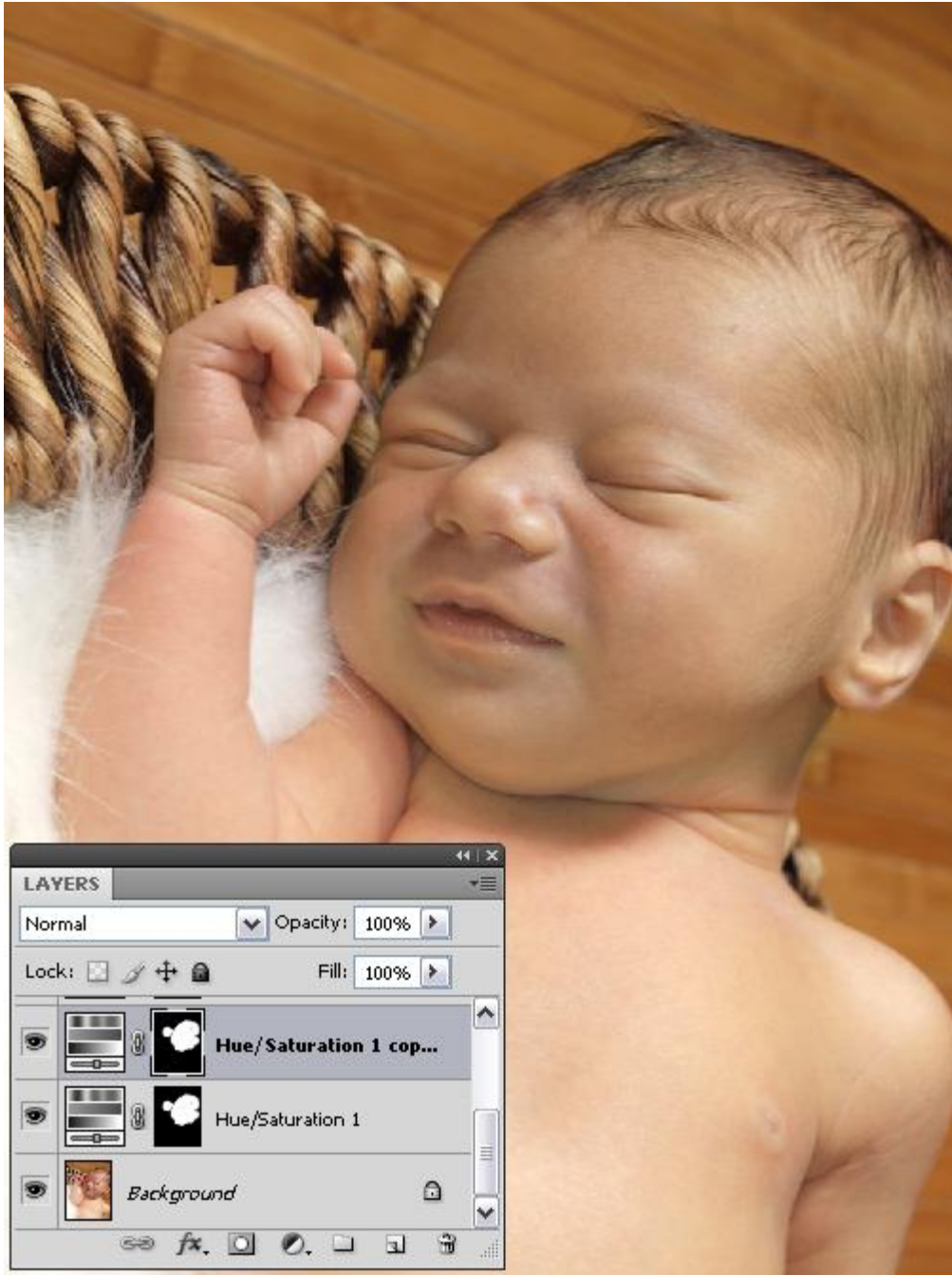
With this done the face looks better but now the body looks to yellow. You need to use the mask on the adjustment layer so that these adjustments only affect the overly red skin. First, flip the mask from white to black. This can be done by selecting the mask and press **Ctrl + I** to invert it. Now the whole adjustment layer is hidden. Use a medium soft brush (low hardness value) to paint white onto the mask over the face and red parts on the fingers. The image below shows the mask itself (**Alt + click** on mask) so you can see what I mean.



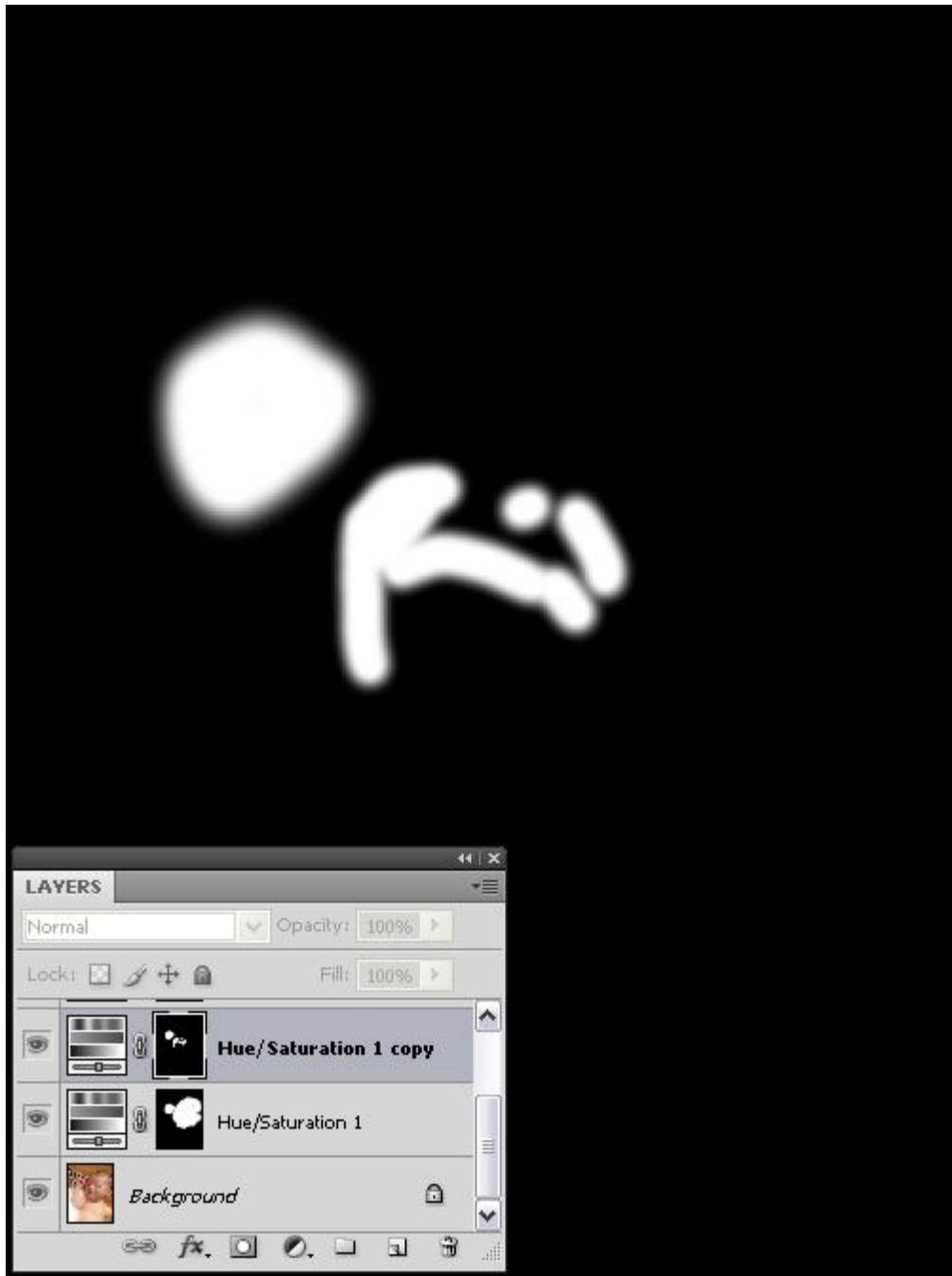
The skin on the face is starting to look a lot more balanced with the rest of the body. However there are some parts that are a stronger red so these bits need a little extra work.



To do this duplicate the Hue / Saturation adjustment layer you already created (right click > duplicate).



As before you will need to adjust the mask so that it only affects the few areas that are still overly red. Fill in the mask with black by clicking on mask, Selecting all (Ctrl + A) then filling in black (edit > fill > black). Then with a white soft brush paint over the areas that need the extra treatment.



The skin should now look a lot more balanced in colour.

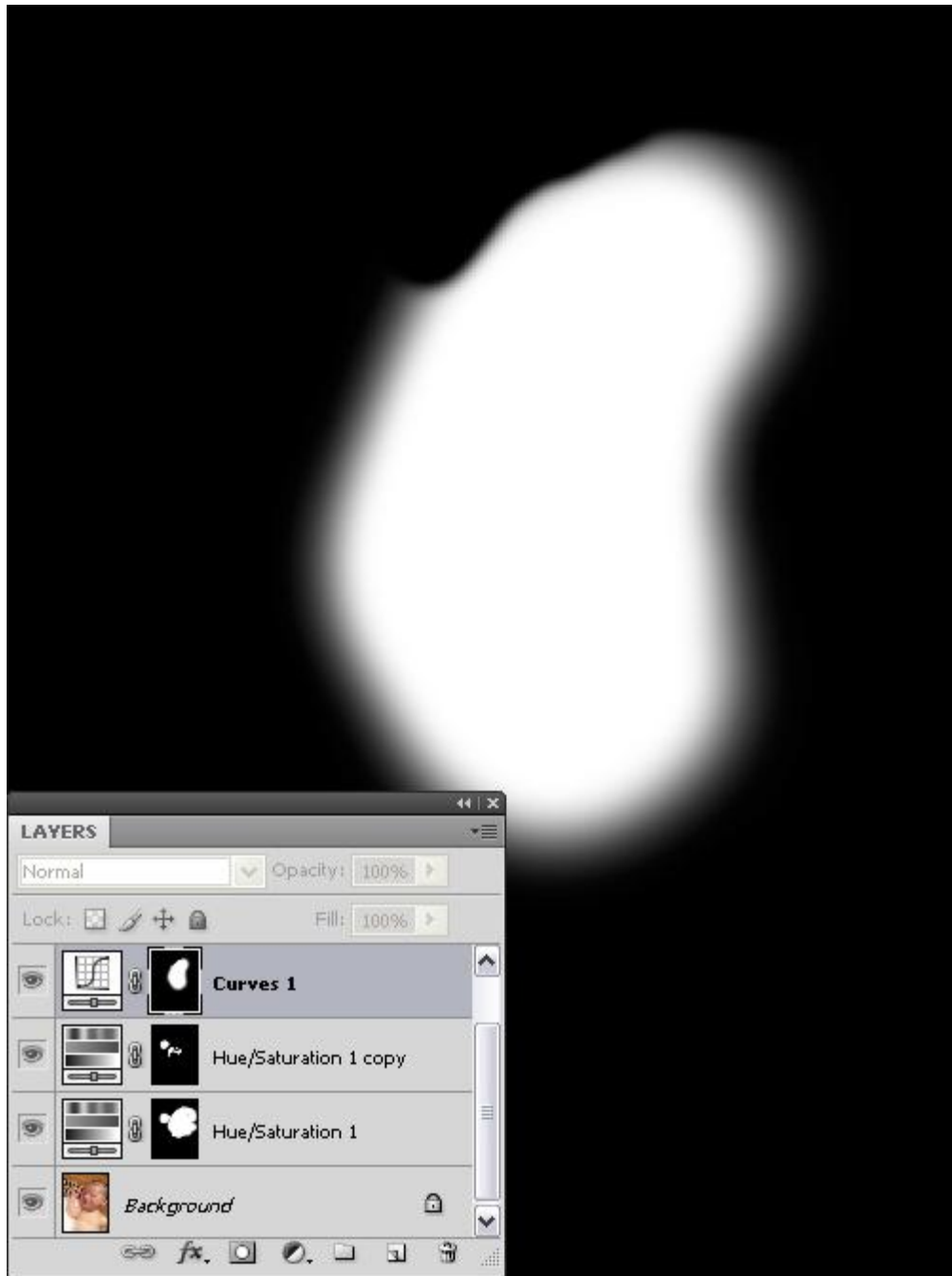


The face is still a little dark so it needs to be lightened a touch. To do this we will use a Curves adjustment layer (If you are using elements you will need an alternative method which I will explain shortly).

Add a curves adjustment layer (Layer > new adjustment layer > curves). When you do this you will see your curves options appear in the adjustments window. What you need to do is click in the middle of the line and drag it so that it puts an upper curve into it as displayed in the image below. What this does is lighten the mid-tones more than it does the shadows and highlights creating a smooth transition between them.



You will be able to see that the face has lightened up nicely. However so has the rest of the image. We only want this adjustment to affect the face so use the mask on the adjustment layer so that only the face shows these adjustments. Make the mask black and then paint white onto it where the face is.



Elements user alternative

If you have elements then the curve adjustment layer isn't available. However a basic curves adjustment option is. Instead of using an adjustment layer, stamp visible (Shift + Ctrl + Alt + E) to create a flattened image at the top of the layer stack. Then open up your curves adjustment found in the top menu and use the sliders to create a curve similar to the image above. Then add a mask to that layer to look like the one above. The result is the same, its just a different method needed.

The face now matches the rest of the body for both skin colour and brightness. The last thing to do is add a little contrast to the image. To do this add a Levels adjustment layer.



With the Levels adjustment layer selected kick in the shadows and highlights by a small amount. For this image I set the shadows to 12 and the highlights to 255.



The adjustments are now complete. You would never know this baby had a bruised face when it was born.

