



HOW TO PLAY WITH YOUR BABY AT HOME TO PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT

BABY LAYING ON THEIR BACK

When lying on their back, a baby works on many important skills:

1. To keep their head in midline
2. Lifting their arms and legs against gravity which helps to strengthen their muscles, especially the abdominal muscles.
3. Bringing hands forward to reach
4. Develop eye contact
5. Reduce arching

Examples include:

Lying under a play mat



Lying in your lap



PLAY IDEAS:

- Hold a toy within easy reach for your baby to touch
- Sing a nursery rhyme
- Play games such as "So Big" or "Pat-A-Cake"
- Make funny faces & sounds



BABY LAYING ON THEIR SIDE

In sidelying, a baby works on many different skills:

1. Gravity helps to bring the baby's arms and legs together at midline
2. The baby needs less effort to move their body than when they are on their back
3. The baby is well supported so they can more easily coordinate moving their arms to reach a toy, to bring them together, or to bring them to their face.
4. It helps to develop the rib cage muscles which are important for breathing.
5. It starts to teach them how to roll.

Examples include:

Lying on the floor with a toy



Lying while propped



PLAY IDEAS:

- Hold a toy within easy reach for your baby to touch
- Help your baby bring their hands to their face or mouth
- Open a book in front of baby and help your baby touch the pictures
- Help your baby hit the keys on a toy piano, roll a ball or toy car.



“TUMMY TIME”

Why is it important?

It is important that a baby has time on his belly in order to strengthen his neck muscles, and work on the essential developmental milestones, such as rolling and crawling. It also gives him a chance to get pressure off the back or sides of his head, which can lead to flattening of these areas.



When should we do it?

Choose a time when your baby is awake, has been fed, and is happy. Try to do tummy time 3-5 times a day for 15 minutes each, or as long as the baby tolerates it.

How do we do it?



Put your baby on the floor and encourage him to lift his head up. You can do this in many ways. Try lying down in front of him and making noises, or you can put something that interests him in front of him, such as a mirror, a sibling, a pet, the TV, or a toy that has lights or sounds. Try tickling the back of his neck to see if he will lift his head.

What if my baby doesn't like it?

- You can try to prop her up on a small pillow or rolled-up receiving blanket. Put the blanket under her chest at her nipple line, and put her arms over it. This will allow her to have a little extra support and may improve her tolerance of tummy time. Start with having her do it for a minute and work up the time as she tolerates.
- You can also try to do tummy time while she is lying on your chest. Lie on the sofa, slightly reclining and place your baby on your chest. Play with her and encourage her to look up or push up. Slowly lower yourself so that you are lying flat on the sofa with your baby on your chest. Play with her in this position. Work on this until she tolerates it well, and then gradually transition her to tummy time on the floor.



***** Make sure your sitter or daycare also is aware of the importance of tummy time when your baby is awake.**

!!! Remember: Tummy time is only used when your baby is awake. Always put your baby on his back to sleep!!!



LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Read rhyming books to allow your baby to hear similar sounds.
 - a. Dr. Seuss
 - b. Books by Iza Trapani
 - c. Children's Rhymes: Humpty Dumpty, Little Miss Muffet, etc
2. Play hand games and songs
 - a. Pat-a-cake, So Big, Wheels on the Bus, 5 Little Ducks, Itsy Bitsy Spider, etc.
3. When speaking to your child throughout the day, encourage the consonant-vowel sounds that familiar words begin with.
 - a. Ex: "Do you want the ball? Babababa ball. Here's the ball."
4. Try using baby signs for simple commonly used words.
 - a. Using sign language actually helps promote the development of actual verbal language.
 - b. Good words to try are: more, all done, milk, eat.
 - c. You can also try to get him to do other gestures such as waving bye-bye, blowing kisses, and clapping.
5. Have a "conversation" with your baby. When your baby makes a sound, you mimic it or make a new one. Then, encourage her to make another sound back to you.
 - a. Try to specifically encourage consonant-vowel sounds such as "ba, da, ma, and na".
 - b. Make good eye contact during this activity.
6. Use a mirror to encourage her to look at her face and her mouth. Have her talk to her image. You can also do this with your face. Try to get her to move her mouth the way yours is moving.
7. Encourage silly sounds – raspberries, laughing, sing-song sounds.
8. Talk to your baby frequently throughout the day. Tell him what you are doing, describe things he may be seeing, tell him colors, count with him, recite the alphabet, etc.



VISUAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Visual attention and the ability of the infant to follow or track a person or face helps your baby to calm themselves, gain head control, and bond with you!

To help your baby work on their vision:

- make sure the lights are dim,
- your baby is in a calm, quiet, alert state
- swaddle them to help them stay calm and give the baby more energy to attend visually
- make sure your face is 10-12 inches away from your baby's. You can do this in a variety of positions:



At first, your baby will be most interested in your face rather than a toy. As they get older, they will be more interested in objects other than faces.

Some babies attend better if you talk, sing, or make funny faces. At first, your baby will make eye contact for 2-3 seconds. As they are able to make eye contact for longer periods of time, you can try to work on visual tracking.

To work on tracking, catch your baby's gaze, and slowly move your face to the right and left and watch as your baby follows you with their eyes. Once they have achieved this, you can try moving your face up and down to see if they can follow in that direction.



HEAD SHAPE CONCERNS



Babies who have a stay in the NICU are more likely to be at risk for head shape issues.

What causes head shape deformities?

- Baby's skulls are made up of individual bones that are not fused together and are more "moldable". This is especially true for premature babies.
- Long term positioning with the head turned only to one side. This can be due to ventilators, feeding tubes, or caregiver providing diaper changes or feeding from the same side.
- Unusual positioning in utero or having a difficult delivery
- Lack of tummy time or too much use of infant carries, bouncers, swings, etc.

What are the signs I should look for?

- Flattening of your baby's head or face.
- Neck fold asymmetries.
- Baby's preference to look in one direction or to one side.
- Baby's head consistently tilts towards one shoulder.

How can I prevent and/or treat head shape deformities?

- Minimizing infant time spent in car seats, strollers, or swings where baby's head is in one position.
- Changing the position of your baby in their crib or bassinette on a weekly basis (so baby's head is at one end of the crib one week, and then switched to the opposite end the next week)
- Changing your baby's head position while bottle feeding (such as feeding with your baby's head at your left side, then switching to your right side the next feeding) unless otherwise advised by your doctor.
- Playing with your baby from both their left and right sides using different sounds, toys mobiles, mirrors, etc.
- Stretching or exercising your baby's neck if recommended by your baby's physical therapist.
- Increasing the amount of tummy time while your baby is awake and supervised. (Aim for 5+ minutes at a time, at least 3 times a day)



FOSTERING YOUR BABY'S DEVELOPMENT WHEN THEY GO HOME

Corrected Age

- When a baby is born early, their brain and neurological system have not yet developed or matured to the same degree as a baby born at term. We need to take this into account when we think about your baby's developmental abilities. Just because they were born early, doesn't mean that they matured any faster! We use your baby's corrected age as a way to evaluate their development.
- To determine your baby's corrected age, the easiest way is to use your baby's due date (not their actual birth date). You can also subtract the number of weeks (or months) your baby was early. For example: if your baby was 2 months early, and they are now 4 months old, their corrected age is 2 months.
- Corrected age is used until your child reaches an actual age of 2-2.5 years old.
- For the activities listed below, you will use your baby's corrected age

0-2 months corrected: Wide-eyed & Watching

- To help develop head control, when held at your shoulder:
 - Hold your baby high enough so they can look around
 - Let your baby raise their head, but keep a hand near to support if necessary
 - Turn your back to a mirror so your baby can see themselves
 - Have someone stand behind you and talk to your baby
 - Walk around so there are new things to see
 - Remember to alternate which shoulder you are using each time
- Tummy time (*when awake only) – see tummy time sheet for details.

1-4 months corrected: Cooing & Cuddly

- Baby is able to:
 - smile when spoken to
 - show some head control in an upright position
 - open their hands most of the time
 - sleep for longer stretches of time
 - shows interest in seeing different things and hearing different sounds
- Offer your baby:
 - a massage after bath
 - the feel of soft fabric and textures on their skin
 - repetition of sounds they make
 - stimulation by opening and closing your mouth and eyes



- musical toys
- soft toys that squeak or crunch
- tummy time

4-6 months corrected: Shake, Rattle, & Roll

- Baby is able to:
 - Smile, laugh and squeal
 - Roll over from stomach to back
 - Reach for and bat at objects
 - Pass toy from hand to hand
 - Recognize their own name
 - Bring a toy to their mouth
 - Stand up if held under their arms
 - Make distinct vowel sounds
 - Hold head up, press up on elbows or hands, and rock when on tummy
- Offer your baby
 - Your response when they “talk” to you. They will answer back and smile!
 - Safe squeaky toys and rattles to grab and kick
 - A game of pat-a-cake
 - A mirror to look at self
 - Time to play on tummy
 - Different places to play during the day; they like to see new things
 - Toys to teethe on
 - Time to listen to you read

7-9 months corrected: Curious & Cuddly

- Baby is able to:
 - Sit up alone
 - Babble a lot, using consonant-vowel combinations (baba, dada, gaga)
 - Roll around
 - Scoot on tummy or crawl
 - Put toes in their mouth
 - Learn to use fingers
 - Solve simple problems, such as making a bell ring
 - Look at and study things for a long time
 - Get your attention by crying or making sounds
 - Clap their hands
- Offer your baby
 - A container to put things into
 - The opportunity to explore – they are very curious



- Reading books and pointing out pictures that they see everyday
- Hide toys under a cup or cloth for them to find
- Cause and effect toys
- Push-pull toys

10-12 months corrected: Active & Adorable

- Baby is able to:
 - crawl
 - sit with good balance
 - pull up onto furniture and walk holding on
 - walk if hands are held
 - sit down from a standing position
 - speak a few familiar words
- Offer your baby:
 - Animal sounds
 - Songs with gestures (wheels on the bus, itsy bitsy spider)
 - Play hide and seek
 - Roll a ball back and forth
 - Use common words often and in short phrases (mama, dada, milk, ball, etc)
 - Teach them to pick up toys by doing it with them
 - The opportunity to make food choices

13-14 months corrected: Energetic & Exploring

- Baby is able to:
 - Climb onto a low ledge or step
 - Stand alone and walk
 - Stoop and stand up again
 - Speak 2-3 word sentences
 - Wave bye-bye
 - Take off clothes, but can't put them back on yet
 - Open and close doors
 - Look in the correct direction when asked where something is
 - Stack blocks
- Offer your baby
 - Shape sorters/
 - Riding toys
 - Small blocks for stacking
 - Stacking rings
 - Nesting toys
 - At bath time name their body parts
 - Pretend play (dolls, kitchen, trains, toy phone)