



active play everyday

Factsheet No: 1



Baby's first steps to play!

We all know babies need lots of sleep but did you know that playing is important too? From birth to first steps is an exciting and busy time in a baby's growth and development – and it's also a great time for some fun! It's important to make the most of the time your baby is awake for play and movement. This not only aids your baby's development, but can help put in place valuable physical activity habits that lead to life-long participation.

Getting things moving

No two babies are exactly the same and your baby's growth rate and development may differ from other children of a similar age. While each baby tends to go through stages of development in the same order, the timing can vary a lot. At first, babies' movements are instinctive and part of the reflex actions they are born with. Around eight weeks, babies start to knowingly move their arms, legs and body, for example reaching out to touch something. Lots of time and practise will see babies develop stronger and more specific movements, such as grasping objects.

Why play?

Through play, babies learn movement and how to interact with the environment and the people around them. Movement excites the senses (such as sight, sound and touch) and challenges babies to learn new skills and emotions. Play opportunities start from birth.

Tips for play

- Parents are the 'best toy' for their baby.
- Babies respond best to faces (especially their parents'), patterns and strong colours.
- Music and rhythm help to develop listening skills, language, and coordination, as well as encouraging playful movements.
- Play can take place indoors or outdoors, as long as your baby is supervised and safe.

Tummy time

'Tummy time' happens any time you carry, position or play with babies while they are on their stomachs. It should be part of your baby's routine from an early age as it plays an important role in the development of sensory and movement control. By the end of the first year of life, your baby should have developed strength, body awareness and the physical skills needed for rolling, grasping, sitting, crawling and standing. To help do this they need plenty of opportunities to play on their tummy during waking hours. To get the most out of 'tummy time', you may like to get down on the floor with your baby, or place toys or suitably sized objects around your baby that encourage safe grasping, leg kicking and head lifting.

Remember to never put your baby on his or her tummy to sleep. 'Tummy time' is only for when babies are awake and supervised. Right from birth you should always follow safe sleeping habits and put your baby on his or her back to sleep. This decreases the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and sleeping accidents.

Your baby's first role model

Children learn by watching what other people do, particularly their parents and carers. You can play a vital role in your baby or toddler's development by providing endless opportunities for movement and play. Be a positive role model and encourage a love of outdoor play through regular walks with baby in the pram and time spent outside.

Initiative of



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An ACT Government initiative developed in partnership with Heart Foundation ACT

Movement milestones*

The first months

The first months of life provide plenty of exciting challenges and lots of learning opportunities for your baby. Babies will begin to develop greater control over their bodies and start to show an interest in the people and objects in their environment. Objects and toys that are textured, colourful, make sounds and are 'graspable' are best in the first months of life. To make sure your baby is safe when playing, check all objects and toys and avoid choking hazards or other potential injuries.

Three–four months

Reaching, finger play, grasping, leg and arm movements, rolling and head lifting are part of development from three to four months of age. Play ideas include rattles, mirrors (placed away from baby), 'tummy time' mats, mobiles and toys that reward movement with sounds and music.

Four–six months

Your baby's movement at this age includes rolling, moving forward, pushing the legs, grasping objects, and developing stronger head control. Babies will also be developing moods and emotions. At five months a baby can grasp a toy with one hand, and then transfer it to the other. With help, a baby may also be able to lift up to a standing position as early as five months. At six months, muscles are often strong enough for baby to sit, with support. At four to six months, toys that move, make sounds, or vary in pattern, texture and colour, are appropriate.

Seven–eight months

By seven to eight months babies can use creeping and sliding their bottom as their means of moving around. At seven to eight months babies may also start to crawl in a recognisable manner. At first, the arms tend to do most of the work, though very soon your baby will be able to move more smoothly and with very little effort. Between seven and eight months of age, babies may start to support their weight during standing. Push and pull games with a soft colourful ball are a great active play idea for babies at this age.

Eight–twelve months

By now, a baby's grasping ability is strong and refined enough to pick up some objects. At around eight months of age, babies may begin to stand and progress to walking while holding furniture. Babies of this age also enjoy repetition through toys that prompt pushing and pulling, stacking and releasing, and gentle, rhythmic like sounds. Examples of active play ideas include swinging together with your baby on a swing (child seated on your lap), sliding down a slippery dip with your baby seated on your lap, and rolling and crawling activities.

Twelve–fourteen months

At approximately 12 months of age your baby may take their first steps towards walking by pulling up on the furniture and moving round it. Eventually baby will stand back, holding on with one hand, poised to walk alone. During this period your baby will be able to hold two or three objects in one hand and turn containers over to dump their contents out. He or she may progress to crouching and picking up a toy and carrying it across the room. Babies may also start exploring and climbing onto furniture – meaning safe supervision is essential.

Examples of active play ideas include singing games (e.g. 'Hokey pokey' or 'Row, row, row your boat') and movement to music, encouraging your baby to freeze or bop down when the music stops. Various forms of ball play can also be fun. Try gently kicking a ball to your baby so it stops at their feet or placing a tennis ball in the toe of a long adult sock and suspending it - allowing your baby to try to hit it and catch it.

* Please note: This is a guide only. If you have any concerns regarding your child's growth or development please consult with your Maternal and Child Health Nurse or your General Practitioner.

Things to keep in mind

Useful reminders and safety tips for parents to make the most of 'waking' time:

- Spend time playing with your baby every day.
- Limit the time your baby spends in infant carriers or seats.
- Ensure your baby spends minimal time in walking aids, indoor swings or baby bouncers as these limit free movement.
- Make sure children under two are not watching television or other screen devices.
- Provide daily play opportunities through a wide variety of interaction with parents and carers, and toys or play objects suitable for your child's age.
- Check for safety and never use balloons and objects smaller than your baby's fist.
- If buying toys, check labels to make sure they are age-appropriate.
- Ensure play areas are safe and free of sharp or dangerous objects.

For more activity ideas please visit www.kidsatplay.act.gov.au

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