



Y Parenting Tips

Activities and Games to Play with your Baby

Children's greatest period of learning is from birth to five years of age. During the early childhood years babies and children learn from everything they do—from what they see, hear and touch. They learn by:

- listening to your voice and other sounds around them
- watching movement—eg mobiles, people, your facial expressions
- trying new things—eg reaching towards objects, playing with an unfamiliar toy, tasting solid food for the first time
- practising new skills—eg rolling over, eating with a spoon.

Although very young babies spend a large part of their day sleeping, they still need regular stimulation or they become bored. It's important to recognise the signs that your baby is seeking your attention, such as:

- crying (this could mean they are lonely or bored)
- cooing or other vocalisations
- moving about (kicking legs vigorously or waving arms)
- smiling.

Up to three months of age, your baby's movements will largely be uncontrolled—reflex actions such as sucking and swallowing. Some movements—stiffening, throwing their arms out, kicking and crying when they hear a sudden or loud noise—usually disappear around one month old.

What can I expect my baby to learn—and when?

Some early developmental milestones and the common age at which most babies achieve them are:

One month:

- watching faces closely when being talked to or fed
- smiling
- turning the head towards sounds or light.

Two to three months:

- smiling and cooing in pleasure
- briefly lifting the head and chest while lying on their tummies.

How can I help my baby learn?

You can help your baby's learning by:

- encouraging daily 'tummy time'—eg when massaging or drying off baby after a bath—to help develop the muscles needed for rolling, sitting, crawling and using their hands (remember not to leave baby alone as they are unable to keep their faces raised, risking suffocation or they may roll off the bed, etc)
- singing and talking to them—babies love to imitate and will coo and babble in response—telling stories, nursery rhymes and poems, and even reading newspaper articles
- playing different kinds of music—relaxing tunes (such as lullabies), the radio, recordings from nature (surf crashing on the beach, wind in the trees etc)
- placing mobiles over the cot to encourage baby to focus on the movement and develop hand-eye coordination
- using activity gyms to encourage reaching and touching
- allowing them to play with their food, discovering different tastes and textures, and helping them to feed themselves with a spoon—messy, but lots of fun!
- spending time outside together, going for walks or playing, and talking about activities or objects around you—eg cars going by, birds in the trees, a plane overhead
- letting baby crawl on the grass—a great sensory activity
- encouraging splashing and kicking in the bath and playing with bath toys
- playing gentle rocking, touching and holding games
- naming body parts when you change baby's nappy or bathe them
- consulting the internet for further ideas—try—
www.cyh.com/cyh/parenttopics/usr_src_h?stm?topic_id=370&precis=null and
www.health.qld.gov.au/child&youth/fa_ctsheets.

When singing babies nursery rhymes, use accompanying movements such as those (in brackets) over page.



EENCY WEENCY SPIDER

Eency Weency Spider (spider movements with fingers)

Climbed up the water spout (walk 'spider' up baby's arm)

Down came the rain and washed poor Eency out (gently move hands over baby's head and face)

Out came the sun and dried up all the rain (make sweeping circular motion with both arms)

So Eency Weency Spider climbed up the spout again! (walk spider up baby's arm again)

PAT A CAKE, PAT A CAKE

Pat a cake, Pat a cake (gently pat palm of baby's hand)

Bakers man, bake me a cake as fast as you can (use index finger to make circles on baby's palm)

Pat it and prick and mark it with B (pat baby's palm again, gently 'prick' skin and draw a B on palm)

Then put it in the oven for baby and me. (enclose baby's hand in your own hands – pretend this is the oven)

HEADS AND SHOULDERS, KNEES AND TOES

Heads and shoulders, knees and toes (gently take baby's hands and touch each body part as named)

Knees and toes, knees and toes

Heads and shoulders, knees and toes

We all clap hands together. (clap hands)

(Song can be extended to include eyes, ears, mouth and nose)

HICKORY DICKORY DOCK

Hickory Dickory Dock (hold baby's arm gently in the air to make the clock)

The mouse ran up the clock (walk two fingers up baby's arm)

The clock struck one (clap hands together once)

The mouse ran down (quickly move fingers down baby's arm)

Hickory Dickory Dock tick tock. (place baby's hands together and move them from side to side on 'tick tock')

THIS LITTLE PIGGY

This little piggy went to market (gently wiggle baby's big toe)

This little piggy stayed home (wiggle next toe)

This little piggy ate roast beef (wiggle middle toe)

This little piggy had none! (wiggle next toe)

And this little piggy (wiggle small toe)

Went wee, wee, wee all the way home! (move fingers quickly up baby's body to armpit and tickle gently)

OLD MACDONALD

Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O

And on that farm he had a [name farm animal] *E-I-E-I-O*

With a [appropriate animal noise] *here and a* [noise] *there, here a* [noise] *there a* [noise], *everywhere a* [noise]

Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O.

(Repeat using different farm animals)

Disclaimer

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