

Activities at Home

To help your baby learn and get stronger

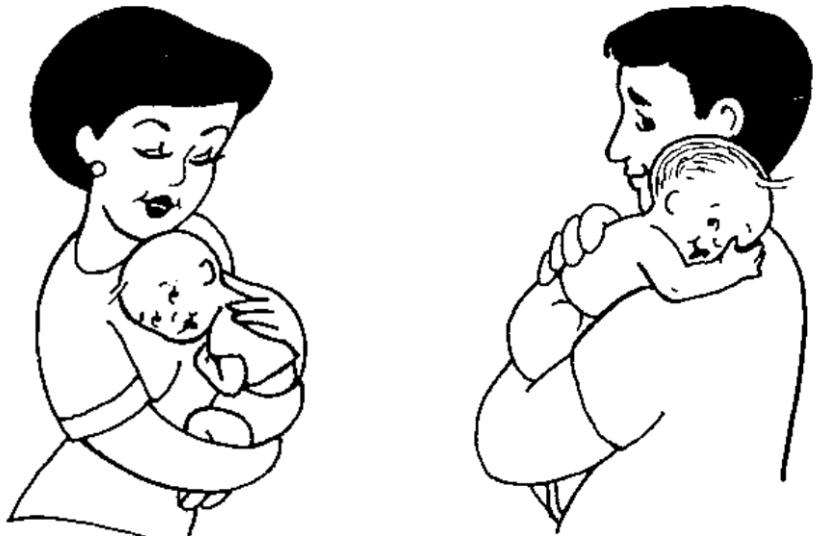
At home, your baby will keep learning about their body from all of the things they do each day. The activities in this handout will help your baby get stronger. They will also help them learn the skills they need as they get bigger.

You can do these activities anywhere, and at any time of day. Remember to always read your baby's cues. If they are showing signs of stress, slow down or take a break from the activity.

Stomach Muscles

To help your baby learn to use their stomach muscles, keep their arms and legs tucked in close to their body. This is called *flexion* or *midline orientation*.

These drawings show different ways to encourage flexion and midline orientation:



When you hold your baby at your chest, make sure their arms are tucked close to their body and their hips and knees are bent softly toward their chest.



When you hold your baby in your arms or on your lap facing you, make sure that their arms are tucked close to their body and able to come together at midline. Also make sure your baby's hips and knees are softly bent.



*When a baby lies on their side with a pillow support behind them, they can bring their hands together in front of their body for play. Your baby should play in this position **only** if they are awake **and** you are watching them.*

Hand Use

It is important for your baby to use their hands in the middle of their body. In the beginning, you may need to guide your baby by putting their hands together, and by letting them grasp your fingers or hold onto small, light toys.

Remember to let your baby touch and play with objects that have different textures and weights, such as:

- Soft things like stuffed animals
- Hard toys like rattles and teething rings
- Uneven or rough surfaces like washcloths or toys with textures

Remember to watch for your baby's cues. Make sure that your baby stays calm while playing.

Head Turning

Your baby may tend to turn their head to only 1 side. It is important for them to learn to look both right and left. When they are stronger, they also need to learn to keep their head in the center.

Being able to turn their head both ways will help your baby's neck get stronger. It will also help keep their head a nice round shape.

- During daily activities, make sure your baby spends time looking right, looking left, and keeping their head centered.
- From time to time, change the position of your baby's crib so that they can see the action in the room from different directions.
- Change the side of the changing table you hang toys on. This will help your baby learn to look both ways.
- Alternate the shoulder you hold your baby on. This will help them turn their head in different directions.

Tummy Time

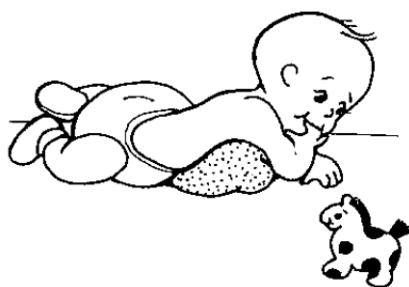
Your baby should spend lots of time on their tummy every day when they aren't sleeping. This position helps their muscle development.

Start tummy time as soon as you get home from the hospital. If your baby does not spend time on their tummy early, they may not like it later on.

Always closely watch your baby during tummy time to make sure:

- Your baby stays awake and safe
- Your baby is not becoming stressed or upset

These drawings show 2 ways to help your baby spend time on their tummy:



Place your baby on their tummy with a small rolled blanket under their arms. This helps them not have to work as hard to hold their head up.



Try placing your baby on their tummy on your chest. They can practice tummy time and still feel like they are being held.

Learning to Use Their Senses

Hearing

Keep helping your baby learn to listen and understand sounds. It's still very important to read and sing to your baby. You can also play soft music.

Sight

- For the first few weeks, keep your baby away from bright lights.
- Your baby will like to look at your face, or at black and white pictures.
- As your baby looks at an object or your face, you can slowly move it. This helps them practice watching or tracking movement.
- Help position your baby so they can see their hands and feet while they are touching, kicking, and playing.

Smell

- Your baby will still enjoy smelling their parents most of all. Keep holding your baby close during the day.
- You might even place one of your t-shirts near your baby so that they can smell your scent when you're not holding them—but, if you do this:
 - Do **not** use a shirt with buttons, zippers, or anything else that could be a health risk for your baby.
 - Closely watch your baby. Remove the t-shirt when you leave the room.
 - **Never let your baby sleep with anything in the crib.**

Body Awareness and Movement

Here are some things you can do to help your baby keep learning about their body.

- Keep holding your baby skin to skin.
- Give your baby a short massage.
- Give your baby lots of time for free movement, outside of a blanket or wrap. At these times, help your baby bring their hands to touch parts of their body, such as their chest, stomach, mouth, legs, and feet.
- While holding your baby, softly rock front to back, up and down, and side to side.

Toys and Play Equipment

Use your baby's *corrected age* when deciding what toys and activities to try. Your baby's corrected age is counted from your due date, not from their actual date of birth.

0 to 2 Months Corrected Age

Babies do not need many toys in the first 2 months. They enjoy:

- Faces, people, soft lights
- Talking, reading, singing
- Black and white, strong color contrast

The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that babies **not** watch TV or computer screens before the age of 2.

2 to 4 Months Corrected Age

- Thin rings and rattles that are easy for their small hands to grab
- Toys they can suck on, mouth, or chew without choking
- Toys with different textures
- Toys that respond to their motion or touch (toys may light up, make sound, or vibrate)

The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that babies **not** watch TV or computer screens before the age of 2.

Play Equipment

- Let your baby spend most of their time playing on a flat surface. This will help them learn to move and support their own body.
- Limit the time your baby spends in seats, swings, standers, jumpers, or other equipment. Too much time in these devices can delay how soon your baby learns how to move on their own.

Other Activities

To learn about more activities for your baby, or to check on what your baby should be doing, visit the Pathways website at www.pathways.org.

As you look up activities that are best for your baby, remember to use your baby's **corrected age**.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Talk with your NICU doctor or nurse if you have questions or concerns.

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit:
206.598.4606

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