



POSITIONING YOUR BABY FOR PLAY AND INTERACTION

Babies all develop at a different pace and many factors can influence their development. Babies who are born early may find some motor and movement skills more difficult at first. This guide will help you understand some early developmental milestones and ways in which you can help your baby with positions and activities to support their development.

If your baby was born early it is important to always use their 'corrected age' when thinking about their development and growth. A baby's corrected age is taken from the date that they were due, not the date they were born. For example, if your child is now four months old, and was born three months early, then their 'corrected age' is one month old. 'Corrected age' is used to assess development until babies are two to three years old.

Early developmental milestones

(0 to 4 months corrected age)

Motor development

– learning to control the muscles in their bodies

- Whilst in a supported position your baby may begin to hold their head in line with their body to look at toys and turn their head to each side to follow things they see in their environment.
- While holding your baby you may notice they begin to try to hold their head up on their own for a short time.
- Following the movement of objects and holding their head up shows your baby is getting stronger and developing head control.
- Your baby may start to develop fine motor skills such as:
 - Learning to bring hands to mouth or hold hands together in front of them.
 - Beginning to feel or hold their clothing
 - When a rattle is placed in their hand they may hold it but not pay attention. Soon they will hold it for longer, start to notice it is there and perhaps bring it to their mouth.

Visual development and spatial awareness

– recognising objects around them

- As your baby begins to have longer awake and alert times they will start looking at things around them.
- Early on your baby may show some interest in faces and high contrast objects such as brightly coloured toys. Later they may become more interested in looking at and following toys and the people around them.

- Your baby will start to use vision to guide movements, e.g. looking at hands, beginning to swipe at toys or touching clothes and body (e.g. in the bath).

Social development and hearing

– interacting with their environment

- Early on your baby may turn to a familiar voice.
- Later, they may smile and engage when someone talks or sings. They may also begin to make some cooing sounds and respond to you with their voice.

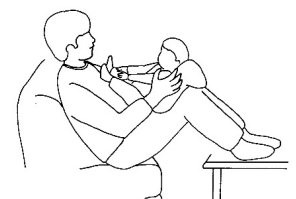
Other milestones

As your baby grows they may begin to develop more mature sleep and awake patterns and routines at home.

Positioning ideas for play or interaction in the early months

Lying on back

Place your baby on their back while awake so they can learn to move their body and turn their head.



Early on supported positions such as lying between your legs (as shown) or on a rug on the floor are useful. You can add a small roll under the thighs to help tuck knees up OR along each side of the body to help bring arms forward and hands to the middle.

Place toys above your baby so they can look at them and put them at chest height to encourage some chin tuck while looking. Sometimes place toys on the rug to the sides – this makes your baby turn their head to each side to look.

Free kicking time on the back with nappy off is fun. Encourage tucking knees up to tummy and hands to knees.

Using a bouncinette or reclined seat – again you may need to use small roll to make sure your baby is well supported and arms are forward. Secure the harness. This is a nice position for looking at toys, or reading a book and showing pictures etc.

In the bath - provide support and allow your baby a little time to kick and push their legs off the end of the bath.

Tummy time

Babies need to spend time on their tummy to develop head control and to strengthen the neck and shoulder muscles. Not all babies enjoy this position early on but there are ways to make it easier and have some fun.

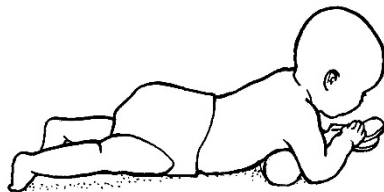
Tummy time should be supervised and best to start with short sessions - a couple of minutes is long enough.

Introduce tummy time by laying your baby on your chest while you are reclined in a chair or on the bed.



Propping on elbows helps your baby hold the position. Your baby may try to lift and hold their head up. This can be tiring at first so they may only manage it for a short time.

As your baby gets better at tummy time they will be able to do this on the floor – it can be made easier if a roll is placed under the chest and by helping you baby to prop on their elbows. Your baby will enjoy looking at toys on the floor or using a mirror to see their face while on tummy. You can also lie on the floor next to your baby.



Continuing to practice tummy time will help your baby to get stronger and it will become easier.

Swaddling

Swaddling (wrapping your baby tightly in a cloth) helps your baby feel secure, reduces startles and prevents disorganised movements that may interfere with sleep or good coordinated feeding. A loose swaddle can also be useful at bath-time while lowering into the water.

There are different techniques for swaddling but the main aim is to provide your baby with a tucked-up position (hips and knees bent up, and arms also bent with hands in front of body). As your baby grows and begins to roll swaddling may no longer be useful.

Babies can be swaddled for sleeping. For detailed information on safe sleeping and swaddling techniques visit the Red Nose website (listed below).

Some key points to remember

- Try to vary your baby's positions during the day.
- Encourage head turning to both sides – watch for a preference for turning to one side or the other.
- Early on positions should be supportive, e.g. swaddling, cuddling in your arms.
- As your baby develops allow some more play periods with freedom for movement.
- Watch how you baby responds to a new position. Sometimes the position may need to be modified.
- Make a note of the things your baby does when they are happy and ready for some interaction. Also learn to recognise when they have had enough or are becoming overstimulated. These signs will help guide you with your daily activity routine.

For more information

Talk to your local doctor (GP), paediatrician or Maternal and Child Health nurse.

Red Nose

(formerly SIDS & Kids)

rednose.com.au/resources/education

Related fact sheets on the Women's website

Early interaction with your baby at home