



Baby Steps

0-12 MONTHS



Playing with your baby means making lots of eye contact and talking, reading or singing to them while you hold them. At this age, your baby can see your movement, hear you and recognise your voice. Your baby will love watching your face and touching different things.

You are your baby's best toy — you can play with your baby anywhere and everywhere.

This play pack gives ideas on how to interact and connect with your baby through play. The main objective of play is to enjoy yourself and have fun. It's OK if your baby seems tired or upset during play, try again a bit later. You can increase play time as your baby is able to stay awake for longer.

This pack also provides practical information on how to care for your baby and where you can go to seek further information & support.

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Scan the QR code to view the instructional 'How to' video library on our website.

<https://bit.ly/m/Next-Steps>

Play and your newborn

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Play is essential for your baby's overall development and wellbeing. Through play, your baby:

- Learns about the world around them and how to interact with it
- Develops their ability to communicate, think, understand, remember, socialise and imagine
- Builds muscle strength and other physical skills

Play also helps your baby learn to trust and depend on you, and the bond between you and your baby gets stronger. This helps your baby feel happy, loved and secure. And, your baby will have the confidence to keep exploring and learning.

How to use the items in your play pack

Please note:

All toys and items should be used with adult supervision.



CONTRAST CARDS

Your baby can see contrasting colours – babies love black and white patterns! Hold the picture 20–30 cm in front of your baby's face.

After a minute or so you may like to show them another picture.

By about 2 months old, your baby should be able to follow the image with their eyes. Move the picture slowly from one side to the other and watch them turn their head to follow it.

Between 1 and 3 months old, your baby should start lifting their head up during tummy time. Put a contrast card on the floor in front of your baby. As they hold up their head, they will be able to see the picture.



BOARD BOOKS

It's never too early to start reading to babies. Slowly read what's on each page of the board book and point to the object or picture. Try to make the tone of your voice go up and down.

Your baby will be delighted in seeing pictures and hearing your voice. And when you turn the pages for your baby, you're showing them how to use a book. You could even make up your own songs and rhymes. Songs that involve lots of facial expressions, touch and hand movements are always great choices.

Remember to choose songs with child-friendly language. Some popular nursery rhymes can be found at <https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/baby-karaoke>.



ANIMAL SOUNDS FLASH CARDS

Hold the cards, one at a time, approximately 30cm in front of your 6–12 month old infant's face. Say the name of the animal e.g. 'dog' while pointing at the picture. Give your child a chance to look at the picture, then say 'dog goes woof woof'. You may like to repeat this a couple of times for each card.

Once your child is older e.g. 2 years old you can also hold up the card and ask them 'what animal is this?' and 'what sound does a dog make?'. You can also place the cards face up on the floor and ask them to find each animal e.g. 'can you find the dog?'.

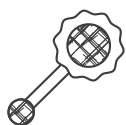


TUMMY TIME MIRROR

During your baby's tummy time, place the mirror on the floor just in front of your baby's face.

Your baby might not notice themselves at first, but as your baby's vision develops, they may start to enjoy seeing their face in the mirror. And you might find that your baby wants to explore by touching it.

You can also play with the mirror at other times — for example, when you're holding your baby.



RATTLE

Newborns should be able to hear most sounds.

Shake the rattle to the left or right of your baby's head. They should turn around to the sound.

At around 2–3 months of age, your baby may be able to follow the rattle with their eyes. Holding the rattle 20–30cm in front of their face, shake it to make a noise and slowly move it from left to right. They should track it with their eyes or turn their head to follow it.

At 4–7 months of age, your baby will probably be able to hold the rattle themselves. You can demonstrate how it makes sound by shaking it yourself first then handing it to your baby.



O-BALL

After 3 months, your baby may start reaching to grasp toys. This ball is easy for them to grip and shake like a rattle.

Once your baby is safely sitting by themselves, sit a meter away (facing your baby and making eye contact) and roll the ball to them.

Roll the ball back and forth and say 'my turn, your turn' as you go. If the ball doesn't go straight to your baby, give them a chance to reach for it.

As your baby starts crawling and exploring the world, stuff the O-Ball with silk scarves.



PLAY SCARVES

- With your 3 month or older baby lying on their back, dangle the scarf in front of their face. Slowly move it side to side, forwards and backwards, up, and down so they can follow it with their eyes.
- Stuff the scarves into an empty tissue box or the O-ball for your baby to pull out (as below).
- Scrunch the scarf into a ball, throw it up into the air and watch it float down.
- Play "Peek-A-Boo" with your baby. Cover your face with a scarf and say, "where's mummy/carer's name?" then uncover your face and say "Peek-A-Boo!" in an excited voice.

At around 9 months, your baby may start to play along.



FINGER PUPPET

Put a finger puppet on your finger.

Say your baby's name then slowly move your finger in different directions (straight lines or circles) so your baby can follow it.

You can also use a silly voice, wiggle your finger and get the puppet to "read" the bath book to baby.

Sing songs while making the puppet dance (wiggle your finger).



NUBY NANA NUBS

The Nuby Nana Nubs has soft bristles that gently clean gums and new teeth. It can also be used as a teether.



BATH TOYS

The stacking cups/toys can be used for both wet and dry play. In the bath, show your baby how water scooped into the cup then comes out the holes at the bottom.

On the floor, show your baby how to stack them into a tower from biggest to smallest, with the biggest on the bottom and the smallest on top.

Talk as you go e.g. 'red cup', 'big cup', 'small cup'. Name the colours as you hold each cup.



THE BATH BOOK

Read the bath book to your baby, pointing to pictures and naming them as you go. You can start by using one word for each picture e.g. 'whale'.

As your baby gets older, you can teach them colours e.g. 'purple whale'.



SINGING

Sing whichever songs you know and like – for example, nursery rhymes or pop songs. You could even make up your own songs and rhymes. Songs that involve lots of facial expressions, touch and hand movements are always great choices.

Remember to choose songs with child-friendly language.

Some popular nursery rhymes can be found at:
<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/baby-karaoke>.



Newborns

WHAT TO EXPECT

Your baby will spend a lot of time feeding, sleeping and cuddling you in the first few months.

Newborns are used to the warm, snug environment of their mother's uterus. This means when you hold and carry your newborn, and talk to them in soothing tones, it can be very comforting. And it helps them as they adjust to life on the outside.

You might find your baby prefer naps while being held or in a baby carrier.

Caring for your baby

FEEDING

Babies rely on breastmilk or infant formula as their only source of nutrition in the first months of life. They need to feed frequently and have around 8–12 feeds in a 24 hour period.

There are many advantages to breastfeeding. For example, breastmilk is free, convenient and can help reduce your baby's risk of infections. Most mothers can breastfeed with the right information, support and care. But if your baby can't breastfeed, infant formula is an acceptable alternative.

Babies are usually ready to start solids at around 6 months old but breastmilk and/or formula is still the most important form of nutrition in the first year of life.

Never give a baby honey.

SAFE SLEEPING

Safe sleep practices are important to prevent Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI). Here are some tips for safe sleep:

- 1/ Always place your baby on their back to sleep.
- 2/ Keep your baby's face and head uncovered.
- 3/ Avoid anyone smoking near your baby at all times.
- 4/ Make sure your baby has a safe sleeping environment for both night and day sleeps – for example, use a safe cot, mattress and bedding.
- 5/ Put the cot in your room or a caregiver's room for the first 6–12 months.
- 6/ Breastfeed your baby (where possible).

For further information on feeding your baby, go to:

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/breastfeeding-bottle-feeding>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/breastfeeding-bottle-feeding-solids>

Further information about safe sleeping can be found at:

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/sleep/sleep-safety>
rednose.com.au.

TUMMY TIME

Tummy time is a way of helping strengthen your baby's muscles. It can also prevent your baby from developing a flat area on the back of their head.

Tummy time should only be done when your baby is awake, alert and being supervised.

Some babies might need some encouragement to enjoy tummy time. Here are some tips to help your baby with tummy time:

- Stay on the floor close to your baby.
- Hold a non-breakable mirror or toy in front of your baby and move it from side to side.
- Talk or sing to your baby with your face in front of theirs.
- Try 'chest to chest' tummy time by lying on your back and placing your baby on your chest.



BATHING

Some babies find being bathed enjoyable. Other babies might need some extra encouragement. For example, you can talk to your baby, sing to them or play with them during their bath.

You can bath your baby in a baby bath or a clean kitchen or laundry sink.

Use slightly warm but not too hot water. Always check the water temperature yourself with your wrist or elbow before bathing your child. Check that the temperature is 37–38 degrees. Or, if you use the bath thermometer supplied in the *Baby Steps Play Pack* simply submerge the fish tail in the water and wait for the indicator to stop moving. When the indicator is in the green section, you will know the temperature is just right.

A soft washcloth and water is all you need to give your baby a bath. You don't need soap.

If your baby has red, dry skin because of eczema, please talk to your family doctor about the best skin products to use.

Some parents prefer to shower with their baby. If you shower with your baby, be mindful that the temperature isn't too hot; you have a non-slip mat and you take care as wet babies can be very slippery!

For further information on bathing your baby, go to:

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/healthdaily-care/hygiene-keeping-clean>.



All babies and children need to be closely supervised near water.

A good rule is that babies and children need to be within arms-reach of a responsible adult at all times.



Maternal Child Health and Nurse Program

(MCHN)

Visits to a maternal child health nurse are an important way of monitoring your child's growth and development. Visits are routinely scheduled at 2 weeks, 4 weeks, 8 weeks, 4 months, 8 months, 12 months, 18 months, 2 years and 3.5 years age.

GREEN BOOK

Your baby's growth and development information will be recorded in your Green Book, which you're given after your baby's birth. It's helpful to keep the Green Book with you if possible.

If you have any concerns regarding your baby's growth, development or health, please talk with your maternal child health nurse and/or family doctor as soon as possible.

You can get free advice from a maternal child health nurse 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by phoning the Maternal and Child Health Line on **13 22 29**.



Support for parents and caregivers

It's OK to ask for support if you need help navigating the challenges that come with raising children.

Support helps you be the parent you want to be. When parents are supported, they're better able to care for their children and their children do better.

If you're feeling overwhelmed or frustrated, give your baby to another trusted adult to hold or put your baby in a safe position in their cot and call someone for help.

It is OK if they cry in a safe place for a few minutes while you calm down. **Never shake a baby.** This can cause permanent brain damage or death.

Postnatal depression (PND) is very common in Australia and is estimated to affect 1 in 7 women. If you've experienced family violence, you may be more likely to experience PND. Help is available.

Online resources

FAMILY VIOLENCE SUPPORT

- **1800respect**
www.1800respect.org.au
1800 737 732

PARENTING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

- **raisingchildren.net.au**
www.raisingchildren.net.au
- **Zero to Three**
zerotothree.org
- **Parentline**
www.parentline.com.au

GENERAL HEALTH

- **Better Health Channel**
betterhealth.vic.gov.au

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

- **Circle of Security International**
circleofsecurityinternational.com
- **Family Relationships Online**
<https://www.familyrelationships.gov.au>

BREASTFEEDING

- **Australian Breastfeeding Association**
www.breastfeeding.asn.au
1800 686 268

PERINATAL ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

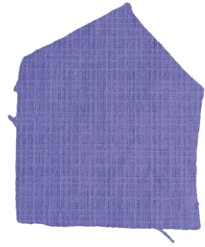
- **Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia**
www.panda.org.au
- **Centre of Perinatal Excellence**
cope.org.au

SAFE SLEEP

- **SIDS and Kids**
1300 308 307
- **Red Nose**
www.rednose.org.au

CHILD SAFETY AND ACCIDENT PREVENTION

- **Kidsafe Australia**
www.kidsafe.com.au
- **Poisons Information Centre**
13 11 26



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In the spirit of reconciliation Next Steps Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

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THE EDISON AGENCY

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AUSTRALIA