

Top Tips: Your Developing Baby 3 – 6 Months

Your baby now shows more control over arms and legs and will soon be able to sit upright. H/she enjoys turning from one side to the other and from back onto tummy which helps with the important later skill of standing and is vital for learning. Exploration continues with lots of banging objects and putting things in mouths! Communication is now about babbling in a sing-song way. When your baby is happy h/she laughs but also cries when annoyed or frustrated. The ideas below will help you to support your baby's development.

Tip 1. Further encourage good listening skills

Help with language development. Play games that involve listening and the use of different sounds. Try knocking two wooden bricks gently together and watch your baby's reaction to the sound. Try tinkling a small bell. Make sounds from different parts of the room to help with attention skills. Watch what your baby does and how h/she reacts to different sounds. Reward with a huge smile and a cuddle. Play different types of music and watch the reaction too.

Tip 2. Have conversations with your baby

This is a good time to help your baby learn more about turn-taking. Have a conversation with your baby. Say a phrase like, "Was that a nice sleep you had?", then wait for a moment for a reply. H/she won't have words as yet but babies quickly learn when their turn to speak is and that conversation is two way. This is also a good way for them to learn about the rhythms and patterns of speech.

Tip 3. Help them to sit up

Increased strength in the neck means your baby now has better head control and you will not need much support for the head when being carried around. Practise having your baby sit in front of you on the floor with legs spread for balance. Does the head wobble? Try gently pulling baby's arms to this sitting upright position. If the head doesn't lean backwards or wobble (by about 5 months), this is a sure sign of increased stability. Now your baby is in a great position to view the world.

Tip 4. Encourage your baby to be physically active

Being able to sit up and have greater head control coincides with being able to roll and turn. You will see this as baby turns from lying on his or her back onto one side and rolling from the side onto his or her back. Avoid letting your baby spend too long in a car seat or baby bouncer. They need time on the floor to explore rolling, pushing up with their arms, leg lifting and lots of stretching out. Time to workout!

Tip 5. Bounce and sing

As your baby is able to sit on your knee with support, you can combine this with singing and nursery rhymes. You will know by this stage which rhymes are favourites. Certainly repeat these, but also introduce some new ones. Do not worry about your singing voice. Your baby loves to listen to your voice. Moving in time to the music with your baby on your knee helps develop their core strength and a sense of rhythm.

Tip 6. Encourage reaching out

Let your baby watch you when you prepare a bottle. Do the same if you breast feed. Notice how excited h/she becomes and is prompted to want to reach out towards the food source with an open mouth. Very soon baby will want to reach out towards a nearby toy. Try placing this just a little further away to encourage reaching. Another idea is to give baby two toys, such as cubes at the same time, which requires reaching out to grasp with both hands.

Tip 7. Provide a range of toys

Your baby will spend a lot of time exploring toys: how they feel, smell, what sound they make, what they do. This is their way of learning while they play. Often the toy will be explored by putting it in the mouth. Don't be alarmed, as long as the toy is not too small and baby cannot be hurt by it because your baby is finding out about the different properties of the material the toy is made of as well as improving their hand-eye co-ordination.

Tip 8. Make lots of hand actions for baby to copy

Babies and young children learn a lot by copying the actions they see others doing. Clapping actions, swirling your hands and arms and finger rhymes are useful ways to accompany rhymes. Pass a toy from one hand to the other and your baby will be keen to do the same. Turn the pages of a picture book to show this action.

Tip 9. Play with your child and watch her expressions.

Get down onto the floor with your baby. Notice his or her body language. Is h/she happy or excited? Watch her facial expressions so you learn when h/she is pleased, unhappy or sad. At bed time your child may well have a special soft toy that helps getting him/her off to sleep – that's perfectly acceptable. Being in an environment where your baby feels loved and safe is of the greatest importance.

Tip10. Reassure with an unfamiliar adult

Your baby will spend a lot of time with you and around 5-6 months, may feel a little anxious when another person arrives. Help to reassure them by telling your baby not to be afraid. Seeing you relaxed and talking with this stranger will also help them overcome any shyness or anxiety and is a good role model. Similarly, introducing other children of similar ages helps with early socialisation.

Important milestones

Moving	Communicating	Learning	Being with others
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can sit upright with your help at 4 months ▪ Helps with holding a bottle when being fed ▪ Starts to find ways to move from 5 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Babbling sounds more speech-like with many different sounds ▪ Laughs and chuckles when excited ▪ Responds to music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Copies familiar actions you do ▪ Can now ignore distractions around. ▪ By 6 months is able to recognise self in a mirror 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognises familiar faces ▪ Often forms attachment to a favourite toy ▪ At 6 months first signs of shyness with strangers