



Chapter 5

Activities for the Young Baby

(Birth to 6 Months)

A new baby does not usually look as though she is doing very much. She spends most of her time eating, sleeping, and resting. But even though she may not seem aware of her surroundings, a new baby is already starting to learn about her world. She does this by using her senses: hearing, touch, smell, taste, and sight.

A baby who is blind or who cannot see well also begins learning as soon as she is born. But she needs your help to introduce her to a world she cannot see.

You can help by giving her many opportunities to listen, feel, and smell. Encourage her to explore and play.



If a baby cannot see toys or people's faces, she does not know that there is an interesting world to explore.



She needs your help to find that out.

As you do activities with your baby, talk to her. Even if you think she is too young to understand the words you say, remember that listening to a person's voice is one of the main ways she will learn about the world. For information on communicating with your baby as you do these activities, see the chapter on "Communication", page 45.



ACTIVITIES

The activities in this chapter are divided into 2 parts: for babies from birth to 3 months old and for babies 4 to 6 months old. These are the ages when babies can begin to work on the skills described here. But remember that it can take months for a baby to learn a new skill. So you may want to work on a few skills at a time. And remember that each baby will learn at her own pace.

BIRTH TO 3 MONTHS OLD

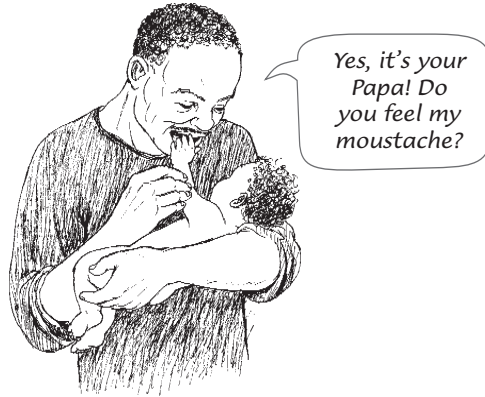
In the first 3 months of life, a baby can learn to:

- recognize familiar voices and sounds
- make noises other than crying
- discover her hands and feet
- lift her head
- tell the difference between smells
- touch and hold objects
- enjoy different kinds of touch
- help calm herself down

► **To help your baby learn to trust people and her surroundings**

A baby who can see soon learns that certain sounds, touches, and smells come from different people or objects. This helps her make sense of the world, feel secure in it, and want to explore it. But sounds, touches, and smells can frighten a blind baby because they seem to come from nowhere. She needs extra help to understand and feel secure in her surroundings.

You can help her understand where sounds and things that feel different come from. Help her know that learning about them can be fun.

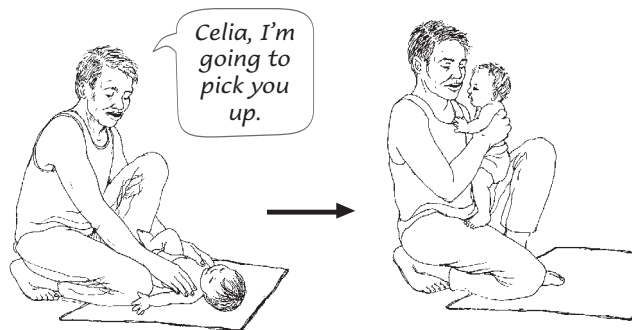


Since your baby may not see what is about to happen, she needs you to let her know what will happen next. For example:

Touch her leg gently before changing her diaper (nappy). Tell her what you are about to do. Soon she will know what to expect when she feels the touch on her leg.



Touch her shoulder gently before picking her up. Tell her what you are about to do. Soon she will know what your touch means.



► **To encourage your baby to respond to people and to sounds**

Keep your baby near you when she is awake. Speak to her often to let her know you are near. She will learn to recognize your voice and respond to it.



Encourage family members to talk with her about what they are doing. If the same person always does the same activity — like giving the baby a bath — she will begin to recognize members of the family by what they do.



Encourage your baby to smile by talking to her. She may smile again if you blow softly on her belly or play with her toes.

Sing and play music for your baby. If she makes sounds, imitate them to encourage her to use her voice.





When your baby begins to make sounds, play with her by putting her hands on your mouth and throat while you repeat the sounds. This also helps her learn where sounds come from.

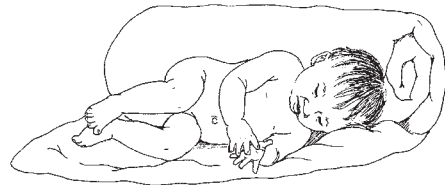
► **To help your baby become aware of her hands and legs, and to use her hands to hold objects**

When feeding your baby, gently push upward on your baby's arm so that she puts her hand on your breast. This helps her get ready to hold objects. Feeding is also a good time to talk or sing to your baby.



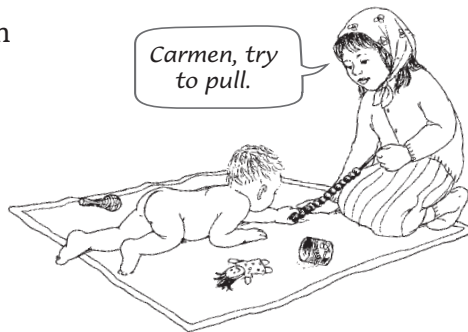
Try tying a toy that makes noise — like a small bell, seed pod, or bracelet — on her wrist or ankle. She will try to find the sound with her other hand and play with it.

Put your baby on her side with a cloth behind her back for support. She will naturally bring her hands together to play.

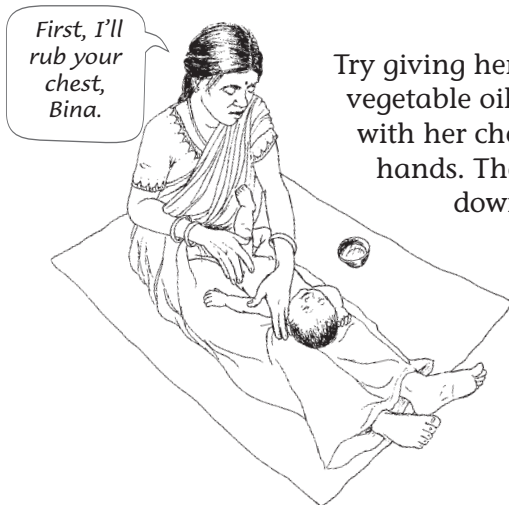


Remember, since small objects can choke a baby, you should stop her if she tries to put small toys or objects all the way into her mouth.

Give her things to hold that will feel different from each other when she touches them, like a piece of smooth, silky cloth and a rough cloth. You can also encourage her to pull on objects like a strong string of beads or a knotted cord. If you pull back slightly, she may pull harder.

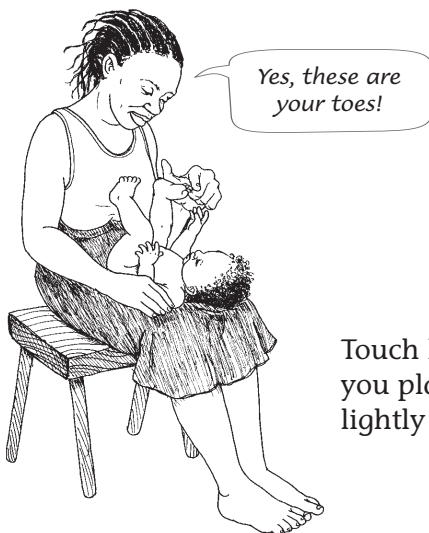


Be careful she does not choke on the beads or swallow them.



Try giving her a gentle massage all over, using vegetable oil, lotion, or just your hands. Start with her chest and move outward to her hands. Then move back to her bottom and down her legs.

After she gets used to your massage, try using cloths with different textures to gently rub her body. Afterward, encourage her to touch different parts of her body — for example, to touch her hand to her legs.



Touch her hands and feet when you play together. Pat them or blow lightly on them and name them.

► **To help your baby develop control of her head**

A baby's neck muscles grow strong when she lies on her stomach and lifts her head. A baby who can see will lift her head up to look at things, but a baby who cannot see will need other reasons to lift her head. Many babies may not like to lie on their stomachs. Your child may be more willing to do this if you:

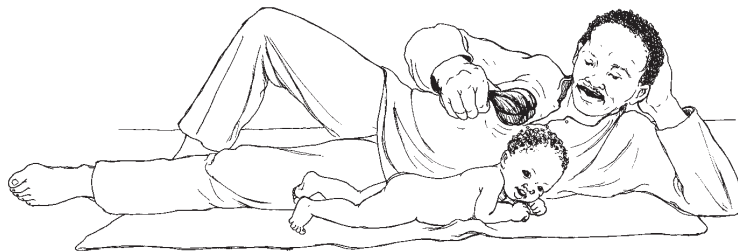
Place your baby on your chest. If her face is near your face, she will want to lift her head when she hears your voice, or she will want to touch your face. You can also hold your arms around her and rock back and forth.



Put your baby over your knees, while supporting her with your hand. Rock her by moving your knees. This is an easy way to hold your child and encourages her to lift her head and strengthens her neck muscles. It also helps her prepare to crawl.



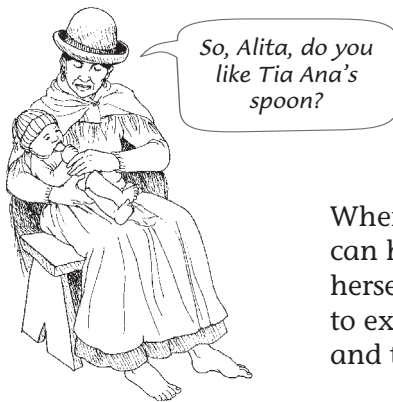
Let your baby feel a noisy toy, then shake it about 15 centimeters (6 inches) above her head. She will often lift her head to pay attention to the sound.



► **To help your baby explore objects through taste and smell**

Babies first learn about the world by tasting and exploring objects with their mouths. This is especially important for children who cannot see well because they must learn a lot through their other senses. Everything the baby plays with should be clean, and big enough so the baby will not choke.

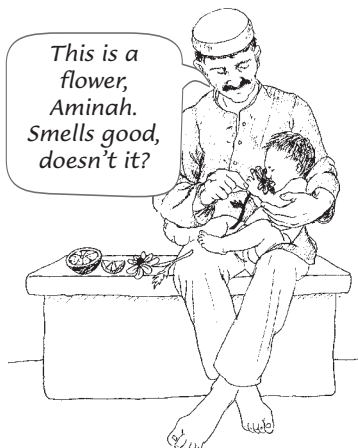
Lightly touch your finger to your baby's mouth. Let her suck on your finger and explore it.



When your baby can hold objects by herself, encourage her to explore their smell and taste.

► **To help your baby feel different kinds of touch**

Play a game by dipping parts of her body in water, naming each part.

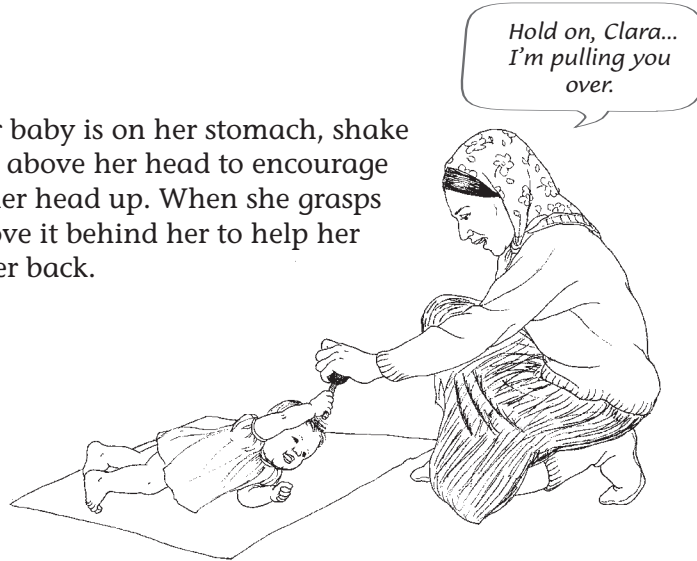


Encourage her to touch things with an interesting feel and a strong but pleasant smell — like fruits, vegetables, or flowers.

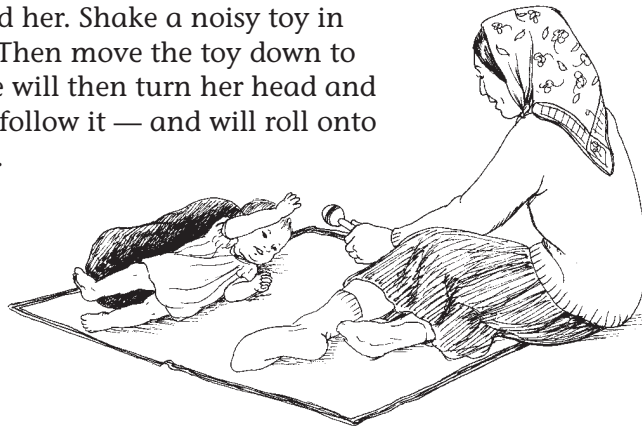
► **To help your baby get ready to roll over**

A baby who can see learns to roll over as she reaches for things. If your baby cannot see, you may have to help her learn to roll over. As her head, neck, and shoulders get strong, you will notice your baby holding her head up and turning when she hears sounds. Now she can prepare for rolling over.

When your baby is on her stomach, shake a noisy toy above her head to encourage her to lift her head up. When she grasps the toy, move it behind her to help her roll onto her back.



Put your baby on her side with a cloth or pillow behind her. Shake a noisy toy in front of her. Then move the toy down to the floor. She will then turn her head and shoulders to follow it — and will roll onto her stomach.



4 TO 6 MONTHS OLD

When a baby gets a little older she can:

- smile in response to a familiar voice or sound
- explore her body to learn what it is like
- make sounds that are like words but do not make sense (babble)
- bring an object in her hand to her mouth
- move an object from one hand to the other
- reach for toys she hears, feels, or sees
- roll over from her back to her stomach, and from her stomach to her back
- get ready for sitting and crawling (for example, by trying to balance while sitting on someone's knee)

At about this age, a baby who is blind may begin to repeat movements over and over.

A child who is blind often repeats unusual movements over and over, like poking her eyes, flapping her hands, and rocking her body.

No one knows for sure why this happens. It is probably because every baby needs to explore and play.

If she does not know there are interesting things around her, a baby will play with the only thing she knows — her body.

You may notice these movements before your baby is 6 months old. These movements may harm her development if they keep her from paying attention to the people and things around her. As she grows up, other children may not want to play with her because her movements frighten them.

The activities in this chapter will give your baby many opportunities to learn new things.

Encourage your baby to explore and play, and she will probably make these movements less and less often.



► **To encourage your baby to reach for things and hold them**

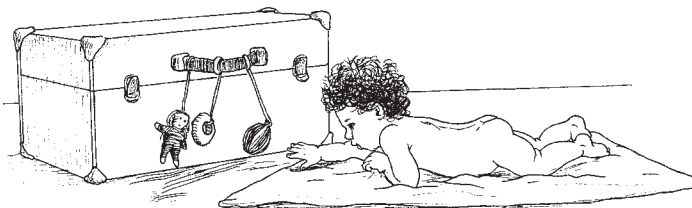
Let her touch objects that have a different feel — for example, furry, smooth, or bumpy toys. After she begins playing with them, move them just out of her reach. Tap the objects on the floor, so she knows where they are.



Shake a noisy object until she reaches for it. (At first you may need to gently push her elbow toward the object.) Then encourage her to shake it and move it from one hand to the other. This will help her learn where sounds come from and will also strengthen her arms.



Fasten objects to your baby's clothes or hands with a short string. If she drops a toy, guide her hand along the string until she reaches the top. This will encourage her to reach on her own and to learn that things she drops have not disappeared.



Keep a few objects in the same place so she can learn where to find them.

► **To help your baby roll over**

If you did the activity on page 39, you helped your baby roll over by pulling on a toy, or by putting something behind her back. Now she can learn to roll over with less help.



When your baby is on her stomach use a noisy object to catch her interest, just as you did before. But when she reaches sideways for the object, move it upward so she has to reach farther. If she is strong enough, she will then twist onto her side, and then onto her back.



When your baby is on her back, encourage her to reach for a noisy object held to one side. Help her roll toward the noisy toy and onto her side or stomach.

► **To prepare your baby for sitting up**

If your baby is not yet sitting up by herself, these activities can help her get ready to sit.

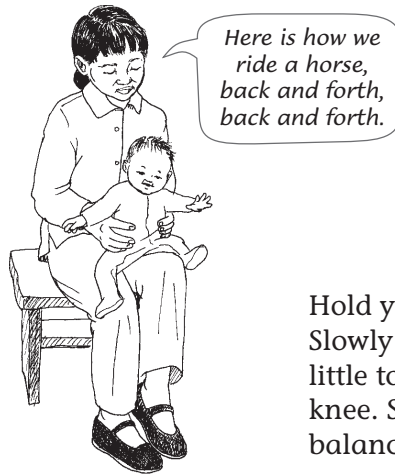
Hold your baby on your knees, facing you, and supporting her back.



Listen to Tata and Pai. They are making balls with clay.



Sit behind your baby, giving her some support with your body.

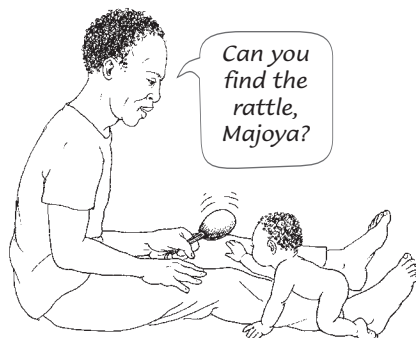


Hold your baby loosely on your knees. Slowly lift one knee so she leans a little to one side. Then bend the other knee. She will learn to shift her body to balance herself.

► To help your baby prepare for crawling

To crawl, a baby needs strong arms and shoulders. She must also be able to balance while shifting her weight from side to side. These activities can help.

Place your baby on her hands and knees over a roll or cloth. The roll should be big enough to give her some support, but small enough that she has to bear some of her own weight. Slowly rock her forward and backward, and from side to side.



Place your baby over your leg or a roll of cloth. Encourage her to reach for a toy on one side, while her arms and knees on the other side take some of her weight. Repeat on the other side.

► **To help your baby enjoy moving and feel safer moving on her own**

You can help your baby enjoy moving by letting her move in many different ways. Keep talking to her as you do these activities. This will help her feel less afraid when doing something new.

For example:



Rock her back and forth in a large cloth or hammock.



Play a game where you and another person pass the baby back and forth between you.

Make up body movements to do together. Bend her legs and move them back and forth. Help her bring her hands together across the center of her body and back again. Bring her hands together and clap them. Use the same words each time to name what you do.



Strap your baby on your back and run or jump.