

Playtime from 8 months helps your baby discover....



Babies develop at their own pace and in their own way as they have different personalities, interests, skills and experience.

You can help them to develop by:

- Noticing what they like to do and encourage them to keep trying until they succeed
- Supporting them to try new experiences - babies need to try things a few times before they can enjoy them.
- Supervising them closely so they can explore and try out new skills safely. Remove anything that is unstable or has sharp corners. Look from your baby's eye level for hazards like power points, cords, strings or dangling tablecloths.

Their body

- Continue to encourage your baby to move along the floor or pull to stand by placing interesting toys out of reach on the floor or on a low lounge. They may like to chase after a slowly rolling ball. Plenty of floor time will also allow them to practise moving between crawling and sitting. Baby equipment is very restrictive and can affect the way muscles develop. For example, babies in walkers (which are not recommended) push with their feet in a sitting position which is not a normal pattern used in crawling or walking.
- Improve their sitting balance by encouraging them to reach forward, sideways, upwards, and later slightly behind them. Play on a soft surface or place a cushion behind them as they may still fall backwards. Place toys so they can just reach them without overbalancing. Allow your baby plenty of time to play with the toys they have worked hard to get.
- Climbing naturally progresses from the same movements children practise when learning to kneel, half kneel and pull to stand. Your baby will move forward and upward, but not backwards – this skill must be taught. Show them how to bend their legs to lower themselves to sit or to crawl backwards down the stairs. They have no understanding of a dangerous position.
- When ready provide them with challenges to help them move their body in different ways, for example cushions to crawl over or a large cardboard box, on its side, that they can crawl into.
- Encourage stepping and walking. At first it is easier to move sideways holding onto a piece of furniture. Place toys along the sofa to encourage them to step. Later they may be able to walk forward if they hold your fingers. They balance better in bare feet, so leave shoes off when it is safe. Babies will fall often, so practise walking on carpet or grass rather than a hard floor.
- To encourage hand skills provide selected “toys” that combine well. For example giving them two different



sized plastic containers, a hanky and a baby safe plastic spoon will allow them to stir, bang, build, stack or hide. Show them how to poke, bang objects together and put things in containers and take them out. When choosing toys remember mouthing is still an important part of exploring.

- Encourage your baby to use both hands. Build a plastic block (or box) tower near their right hand for them to knock down, and then one near their left hand. Give them large soft toys that require the use of both hands to hold.

The world around them

- Meal times are great for developing independence, as well as interacting with your baby. Provide finger food, give them their own spoon and let them help hold their cup. Mess is all part of the learning experience, so you may need to cover a floor that is not easily washable.
- Bath time is a great time to laugh, talk, splash and play with your baby.
- Once mobile, children do not like to lie down and nappy changing time can be frustrating. Talk to them, sing songs, blow raspberries on their feet or give them a “special” toy to play with to help them cope.
- They are now more aware of what is familiar and so need time to adjust to a new person, place or routine. They mirror your feelings by picking up cues from your face. They know if you are feeling anxious or relaxed about situations or people, when you are dropping them at child care for example. It is good for them to see you chatting happily to a carer before you leave them.
- Your baby's brain is developing rapidly so they need to play actively even though the constant supervision they require is tiring. Try to rest when they do, or consider some care for your child, while you do something for yourself. Avoid using DVDs or the TV as a passive baby sitter. Television is not recommended for children under 2 years of age. Use safety gates or a playpen so they interact with you when you are cooking or showering. Keep a few special toys for them to play with at these times.
- The more you respond to their facial expressions, babbling and gestures the more eager they will be to keep “talking”. Respond and wait for them to take their turn. Keep talking about what they can see. Encourage them to mimic gestures such as waving or pointing.
- Playing peek-a-boo is a good activity when waiting in a queue. Cover your face with whatever is on hand (your hands, your bag or shopping items) then uncover and say boo. Place a toy under a scarf or in a paper bag while they watch, and then encourage them to find it.
- Activities such as looking in the mirror, reading a story, saying rhymes or singing songs with simple actions such as clapping or patting can be distracting, calming or just fun.

