



The magic of play

Ideas for playing with your baby during the first year

Healthy Start for Mom & Me

Why is play important?

More than anything else, your baby wants and needs to be with you.

play...

creates a foundation of positive, shared experiences between you and your baby

nourishes you both

sparks joy and imagination

builds connection, trust and love

This book gives simple ideas for play that will help your baby thrive.

Enjoy time with your baby!

Let your baby enjoy time with you!





Follow your baby's lead

Your baby will learn and grow in their own way, at their own pace.

They will let you know if they are having fun or if they are ready to stop.



Birth to 3 months

Playing at this age helps your baby to learn about the world around them.

Your baby is ready for play when they are awake and calm.

They will let you know when they need to stop playing by looking away, arching their back, fussing, hiccupping or crying.



Birth to 3 months

Gentle rocking and talking

Steps:

- 1) With your baby in your arms, find a comfortable place to be together (chair, couch, or cross-legged on the floor).
- 2) Make eye contact with your baby and smile!
- 3) Rock back and forth while saying your baby's name and something positive such as "I love you!" or "You are so sweet!"



Birth to 3 months

Tummy time

What you need:

Blanket
Floor space

Steps:

- 1) Place your baby on their stomach.
- 2) Get down on the floor with your baby so you are face-to-face.
- 3) Make eye contact with your baby, smile and say, "I love you so much!" or "You're doing great!"

Do you know?

Tummy time is important for strengthening your baby's neck, shoulders and back muscles.



Birth to 3 months

Rush of air

Steps:

- 1) Gently blow on different parts of your baby's body (palms, elbows, fingers, neck, cheeks, toes).
- 2) Say the body part as you blow.

Do you know?

It is the day-to-day experiences, like playing, that help to develop your baby's brain.



Birth to 3 months

Bicycle

What you need:

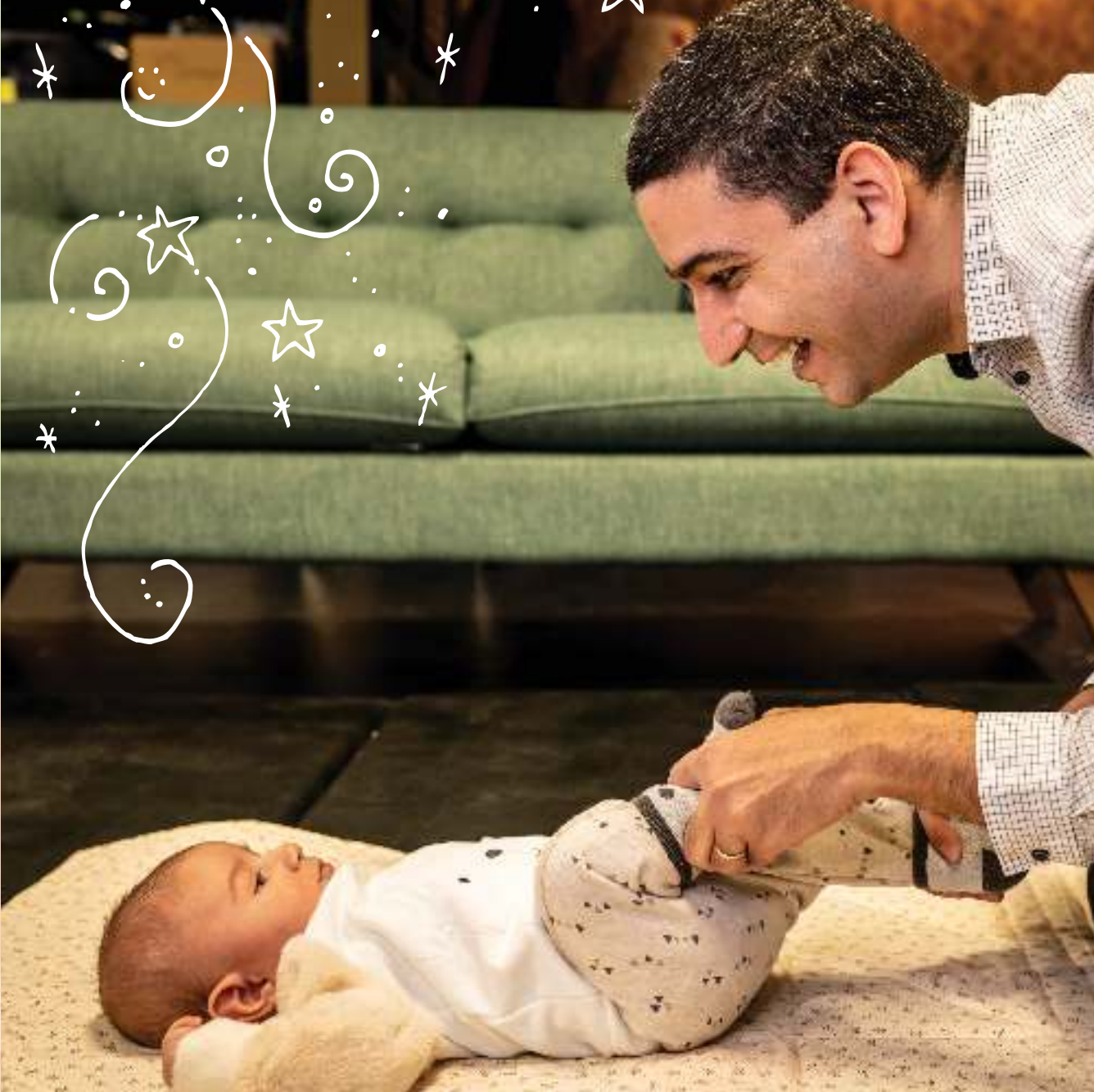
Blanket
Floor space

Steps:

- 1) Put your baby on their back.
- 2) Gently move your baby's legs like they are pedaling a bike.
- 3) Watch your baby's reactions and copy any sounds or smiles.

Do you know?

This movement can help your baby to pass gas.



Birth to 3 months

Back and forth

Steps:

- 1) Hold your baby in your arms, look into their eyes and smile.
- 2) Slowly stick out your tongue.
- 3) Watch and see if baby sticks out their tongue. It's okay if they don't.
- 4) Slowly move your tongue in and out of your mouth for as long as your baby enjoys watching you.





Birth to 3 months

Black and white pictures

What you need:

White paper

Black marker

Steps:

- 1) On white paper, draw simple shapes with a black marker (e.g. triangle, circle, square).
- 2) Lay your baby on their back or hold them.
- 3) Show your baby one shape at a time and talk about it. For example, "Look, a moon!"

Do you know?

Newborn babies see black and white images better than colour.



Birth to 3 months

Finger play

Steps:

- 1) Hold your baby in your lap, facing you.
- 2) Hold your finger in front of baby's face.
- 3) Slowly move your finger to the left and to the right.
- 4) At first, your baby will use their eyes to follow your finger. Eventually they will move their head from side to side.
- 5) Say things like "Look at you following my finger!"

Do you know?

Finger play helps your baby exercise their eyes and neck.



3 to 6 months

At this stage, your baby is more active and is learning to control their body.

They are using more actions and sounds to tell you their likes and dislikes.



3 to 6 months

Tummy on tummy

Steps:

- 1) Lie on your back and place your baby on your tummy.
- 2) With your hands firmly around their chest, raise your baby up in the air and lower them back down.
- 3) Smile at your baby. If baby giggles, do the same!



3 to 6 months



Sock play

What you need:

Sock

Steps:

- 1) Lay your baby on their back or hold them securely on your lap.
- 2) Put your hand inside a sock and use it as a puppet.
- 3) Move your hand to make the sock "talk".
For example, "Hello (baby's name), my name is Mr. Sock!" Try using a different voice.
- 4) Wait for your baby to respond to the sock.



3 to 6 months

Mirror fun

What you need:

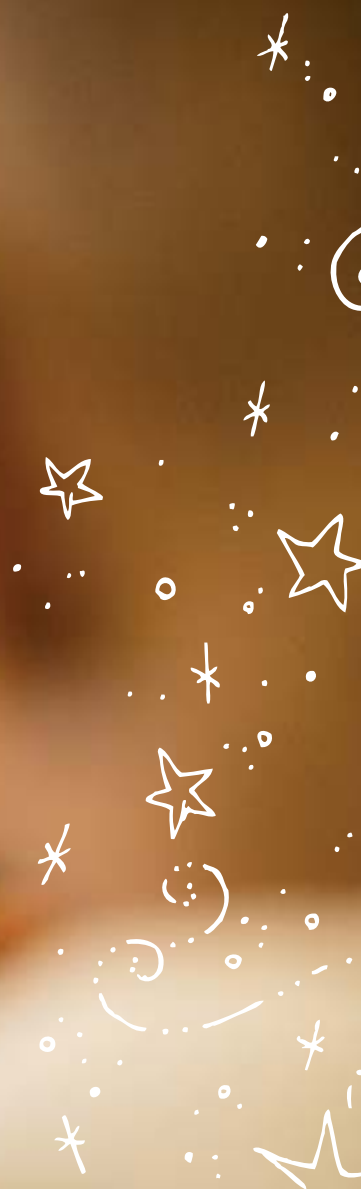
Mirror

Steps:

- 1) Hold your baby while looking into a mirror.
- 2) Wave your baby's hand and say "Hi, (baby's name)!"
- 3) As you touch the different parts of your baby's face, say the word for the body part (e.g. eye, ear, mouth, nose).

Do you know?

Mirrors are a great way for your baby to explore. They love faces and may even reach out to touch the "baby" in the mirror. Eventually they will learn that they are seeing their own face.



3 to 6 months

This little piggy

Steps:

- 1) Wiggle your baby's toes, one at a time, starting with the biggest toe and moving to the smallest toe while saying:

This little piggy went to market (big toe)

This little piggy stayed home (2nd toe)

This little piggy had roast beef (3rd toe)

This little piggy had none (4th toe)

And this little piggy went wee-wee-wee-wee
all the way home (5th toe)

- 2) When you get to the final toe, run your fingers up your baby's body to their chin. Smile at your baby!



3 to 6 months

Let's go on a tour!

Steps:

- 1) Holding your baby in your arms, walk around your home.
- 2) Look out each window and tell your baby what you see.
- 3) Turn the lights on and off.
- 4) Point to objects in each room and name them for your baby.



3 to 6 months

Fun with words

Steps:

- 1) Make up songs and rhymes about what you're doing with your baby (e.g. changing their diaper, making food, cleaning up).
- 2) Your baby loves to hear your voice... the words don't really matter.

Here's an example:

A song: Mommy's changing your diaper,
your diaper, your diaper
Mommy's changing your diaper...
look, all done!

Do you know?

Singing songs to your baby in every language that you know helps your baby learn your languages.



6 to 9 months

At this stage, baby is exploring more and figuring out how things work.

Your baby can easily let you know how they feel.

Some good questions to ask yourself are:

- What does my baby seem to enjoy?
- What does my baby seem to dislike?



6 to 9 months

Peekaboo

What you need:

Towel or small blanket

Steps:

- 1) Sit with baby in front of you and make sure they are well-supported.
- 2) Hold a towel between you and your baby so baby can't see your face.
- 3) Slowly move your face from behind the towel to make eye contact saying, "Peekaboo!"

Do you know?

Babies will learn that although an object can't be seen, it is still there.

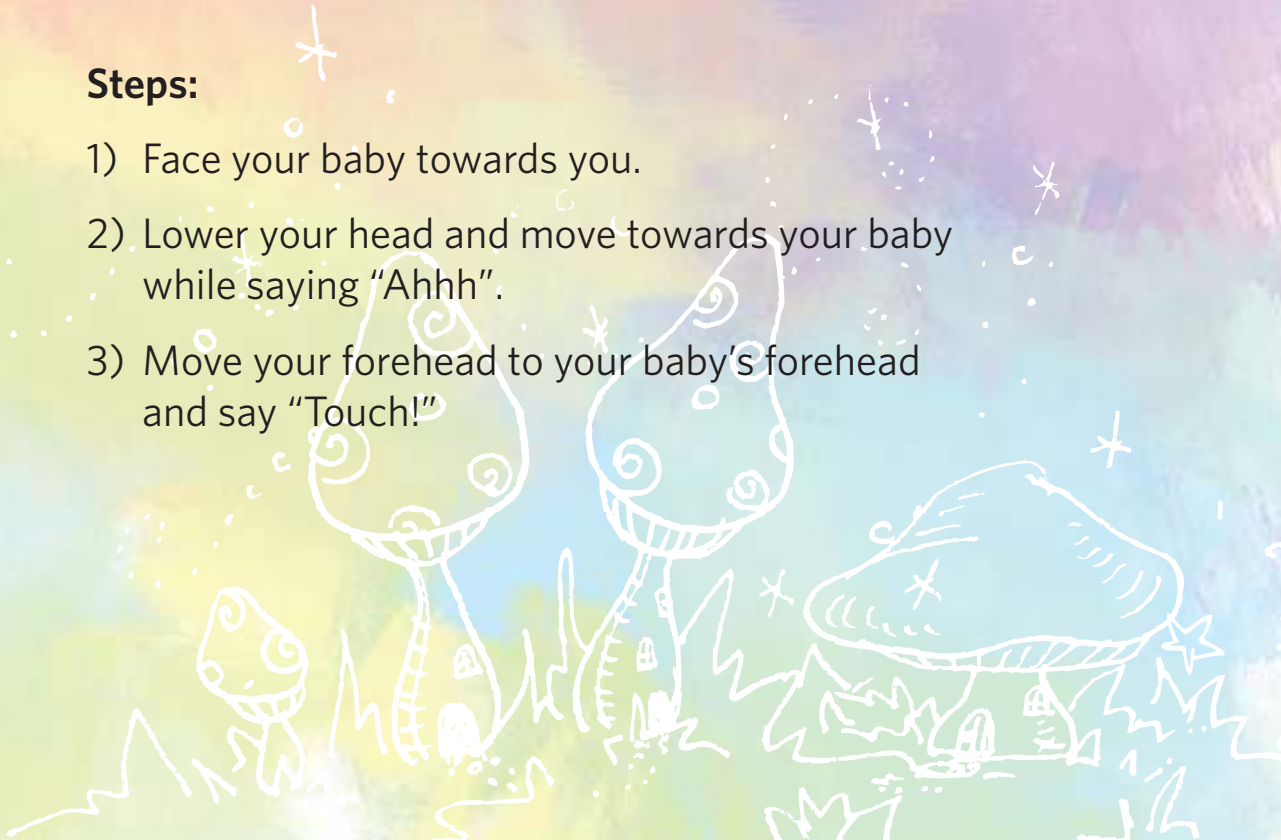


6 to 9 months

Meeting in the middle

Steps:

- 1) Face your baby towards you.
- 2) Lower your head and move towards your baby while saying "Ahhh".
- 3) Move your forehead to your baby's forehead and say "Touch!"





6 to 9 months

Bang on the drum

What you need:

Wooden spoon or large plastic spoon
Empty plastic containers

Steps:

- 1) Sit with your baby on the floor. Give them a wooden or large plastic spoon and containers turned upside-down.
- 2) Watch them make noise and explore!
- 3) Explain to baby what they're doing, and celebrate when they do something new. For example, clap your hands and say, "Hooray! You made a drum sound!"

Your baby might not want to drum, but may like putting the spoon in their mouth. That's great too!



6 to 9 months

Water fun

What you need:

Plastic container
Pot
Scissors or knife
Water

Steps:

- 1) Poke a few holes in the bottom of a container using scissors or a knife.
- 2) Hold the container over a pot and pour warm water into the container.
- 3) Let your baby watch and touch the water!

Do you know?

This activity improves your baby's hand-eye coordination.



6 to 9 months



What's that smell?

What you need:

Different foods
High chair (optional)

Steps:

- 1) Sit your baby on your lap or in a high chair.
- 2) Gently place a piece of food under your baby's nose.
- 3) Say "Can you smell the _____? You smell with your nose."

Examples: orange, grapefruit, lemon, ginger

- 4) Notice how your baby responds. They may like some smells and not others.



6 to 9 months

Getting dressed is fun!

What you need:

Baby's clothing

Steps:

- 1) When you are dressing your baby, play a game of surprise. When baby's head is covered with their shirt, ask "Where is my baby?"
- 2) When you pull the shirt over your baby's face, say with excitement, "There's my baby!"
- 3) You can continue playing this game with your baby's feet, hands, legs, and arms (e.g. "Where's my baby's foot? There's my baby's foot!").



6 to 9 months

Fun with books

What you need: Book

Steps:

- 1) Cuddle your baby in your lap with a book in front of both of you.
- 2) Let your baby hold the book, turn the pages or put it in their mouth. Your baby learns by putting things in their mouth.
- 3) Point to the pictures on the page and name the objects.
- 4) You can also ask your baby questions such as, "What is that? It's a puppy!"

Great books at this stage are:

Small board books with pictures and short sentences

Waterproof books (great for the tub!)

Cloth books that baby can chew on (and you can throw in the wash)

Books with things to touch and explore (e.g. rubbery surfaces, soft fur, mirrors)



9 to 12 months

Babies at this stage understand a lot even if they can't say words.

They remember more things now such as what they like and don't like.

Make a safe place for your baby to play and explore. This will help to keep playtime fun and will limit the number of times you need to say "no".



9 to 12 months

Stacking blocks

What you need:

Stacking blocks or cups

Steps:

- 1) Sit with your baby on the floor.
- 2) Show your baby how to stack cups or blocks.
- 3) Once the stack is high, show baby how to knock it over and say "fall down!"

Other things to stack:

Empty tissue boxes

Measuring cups

Empty plastic containers



9 to 12 months

Singing and dancing

Steps:

- 1) Put on your favourite song.
- 2) Hold your baby in your arms.
- 3) Dance and sing!

Do you know?

Music is magic for building your baby's brain. Both sides of the brain are used when listening to or creating music.



9 to 12 months

Blanket ride

What you need:

Medium-sized blanket
Open floor space

Steps:

- 1) Lay a blanket on the floor and place your baby in the middle.
- 2) Say "Let's go for a blanket ride!" then gently pull the blanket and your baby around the room. Whee!
- 3) Go slowly, especially when turning, to help your baby build balance.
- 4) Face your baby, smile and talk to them. They need to feel safe.





9 to 12 months

Copy cat

Steps:

- 1) Sit on the floor with your baby facing you.
- 2) Do fun things like: make a funny face, make animal sounds, lie on your back and kick your legs.
- 3) Pause to give your baby a chance to copy you. Say "You do it!" or "Your turn!"
- 4) When your baby copies you, say kind words such as "Great job!" or "Yes, you did it too!"

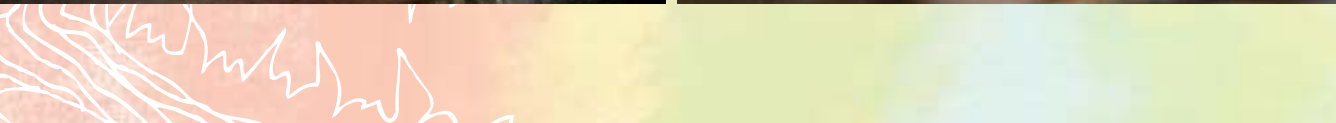


9 to 12 months

Stacking hands

Steps:

- 1) Place your hand palm down on the floor or table.
- 2) Put your baby's hand on top of yours.
- 3) Next, place your other hand on top of baby's hand.
- 4) Now it's baby's turn to place their other hand on top of yours (you may need to help them).
- 5) Finally, pull out your bottom hand and put it on top of the stack.
- 6) Repeat until your baby gets tired of the game!



9 to 12 months

Bubble time

What you need:

Bubbles with a wand

Steps:

- 1) Blow bubbles close to your baby (but not in their face).
- 2) Encourage baby to touch the bubbles.
- 3) Tell your baby about the size and colour of the bubbles.
- 4) Count the bubbles that float in front of your baby.



9 to 12 months

Where did it go?

What you need:

Baby's favourite toy
Washcloth
High chair (optional)

Steps:

- 1) Sit your baby on the floor or in their high chair.
- 2) Show your baby a favourite toy and then cover it with a washcloth.
- 3) Wait for your baby to uncover the toy. If they don't, lift the cloth.
- 4) When they see the toy, say "Wow, you found it!"





Fun, simple ways to play with your baby

Photo credit: Darnell Collins | www.dworksmedia.com

Graphic design/illustration: Cyndi Wiebe | smallcreekstudio@gmail.com

**Healthy Start would like to extend our deepest thanks to all
of the families who participated in the creation of this book.**

Healthy Start for Mom & Me is a charitable organization funded by the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (Public Health Agency of Canada) and Healthy Child, an initiative of the Manitoba Government, and also supported by private donations.

March 2019