Primary Health Care
The First Year of Life
Development

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As a parent you play an important role in shaping the way your baby will learn, think and behave in the future. New research shows that the relationship between you and your child in the early years is a necessary part of healthy brain development.

At no time in life will there be such rapid growth and change in the pathways of the baby’s brain.

Before looking more closely at your baby’s development it is important to remember that:

- Children develop at different rates from each other, but go through the stages usually in the same order.
- Each child develops in their own unique way.

Take time each day to just watch and enjoy your baby
0-3 Months

- Your baby has very basic needs, for example, being fed, kept warm and safe, but they also need a constant supply of attention.

- All babies are interested in faces. Even young babies appear to copy facial expressions and enjoy eye contact. This helps the muscles of their eyes to focus and for your baby to learn to smile. Most babies will start to smile at around 6-8 weeks.

- In the womb babies hear lots of sounds. New babies become upset when they hear harsh noises and prefer softer sounds. The sounds that we make around babies should be quiet and soothing.

- The more babies are talked to and played with the more sounds they will attempt to make.

- Learn to take your cues from your baby. Among the cues they use are their sounds, facial expressions, movements and eye contact.

- Give them something to touch and grasp, e.g. brightly coloured, textured toys.

- Give them time each day to lie on their back to play. This will stretch and exercise their arms and legs. The floor is the safest place!

- To gain control over their head and neck muscles babies should lie on their tummies for short periods, with supervision.
3-6 months

- Your baby will be making a variety of sounds, babbling, cooing, laughing, gurgling. Encourage these by singing songs and rhymes, and involving your baby in everyday conversation, when you go to the shops, the park, or in the car.

- Introduce books to your baby as soon as possible, starting with bright, colourful but simple pictures.

- Babies will be taking an interest in their hands. To encourage muscle control, give them soft toys or rattles to hold. Your baby may bat at objects (baby gym), and sometimes manages to reach and grab things.

- Remember that most objects a baby holds will automatically be taken to their mouth for exploration so do not offer small objects that could cause choking.

- Allow your baby to move freely, but safely on the floor. This will promote rolling from back to front.

- Continue to place them on their tummy with their arms supporting them, to encourage rolling from front to back.

- This is a good time to start routines, as your baby needs to feel safe and secure within the structure of their day, e.g. regular meal times and a bedtime routine.

- If you need further advice about setting routines contact your Health Visitor.
6-9 months

- By now, some babies are able to sit up, crawl, and stand with support. (However not all babies will crawl).

- Some toys encourage standing and walking, but baby walkers are not recommended.

- To encourage babies to move around, place toys just within reach and gradually move them further away.

- Your baby needs to explore their surroundings but please ensure the area is safe.

- Your baby will now be able to pick up tiny objects between finger and thumb. Choking on small objects is still a risk.

- Your baby will be able to hold an object in both hands and bang them together, and may transfer from one hand to the other.

- Playing games with your baby, such as clap hands, peek-a-boo and waving bye-bye, will develop hand eye co-ordination and social skills.

- Suitable toys may include blocks, balls, noisy toys and bath toys.

Never leave your baby unattended near water.
• Sounds will be louder and more tuneful. Babies like to hear the sound of their own voice. Other sounds hard may include, mama, dada and baba.

• Encourage language development by looking together at picture books and telling stories.

• Babies may begin to show fear or anxiety when approached by new faces as they are now able to recognise the difference between strangers and family members.

• Babies have a growing awareness that things exist even when they are out of sight, for example some babies cry when mum or dad leaves the room, or will look for hidden toys.

• Some days your baby may be extremely demanding and time consuming, as they are constantly discovering new skills and trying them out.

• Babies are now able to express the emotions of sadness, fear, pleasure, distress joy and anger.
9-12 months

- Babies will be perfecting the skill they have learnt in the previous months, as well as developing some new ones.

- More babies will now be crawling, pulling to stand, standing alone and even taking a few steps. A push-a-long toy would be useful to assist this.

- Their pincer grip will be more accurate, some babies will begin to point with their index finger, particularly if you have pointed out interesting things yourself.

- Be careful as they will also poke at things such as switches, buttons and electric sockets.

- Meal time ideally should be enjoyed as a family. Your child may be feeding themselves with finger food and even attempting to use a spoon. Although this is a messy stage it is a very important part of development.

- Suitable toys for this age group are those which stimulate development through sight, touch and hearing, for example shape sorters, pop-up toys, picture books and toys that make sounds. Remember there may be household items which can be used as toys, wooden spoons, plastic tubs, pans.

- Babies discover new ways to attract your attention by making more noise and by throwing, banging, shaking and taking their toys to pieces. Having someone there to pick up the pieces only adds to the enjoyment of the game.
• Your baby will become more involved in everything around them, and will be able to recognise their own name. They will also be interested in other people’s conversations.

• Recognisable words should be responded to and repeated enthusiastically.

• Your baby will be able to voice their opinion with long strings of babble and will entertain you all day long.

• Remember your baby won’t be a baby much longer, but even as your baby becomes more mobile and gains independence they will need you more than ever.
The Information in this booklet can be provided in large print or in audio format on request.