



How To Play With Your New Baby

*Simple Play Activities to Engage,
Communicate and Enjoy with
Your Baby in the Early Days*

www.totsplay.co.uk

Are You Ready to Play?

Welcome to How to Play with your New Baby, and many congratulations on the new addition to your family. I am looking forward to sharing with you some simple ideas to engage, communicate and enjoy play times with your baby in the early weeks and months of their life that will also have a huge amount of benefits for their development.



This e-book is divided into 6 sections each introducing an essential element of play that will support your baby's growth and development. You will learn some **“Getting to Know You Games”**, help your baby understand **“Body Basics”**, have some fun **“Moving and Grooving”**, learn some easy **“Brain Boosters”** and find out why **“Simple Sensory Play”** can provide such great benefits. But why do you need to spend time playing with your baby anyway? Let's start finding by out...

Why Play Time is Important for your Baby?

Before he or she came along you were probably focused mainly on what would happen at the birth and how you would tend to your new little one's basic needs, such as feeding and changing, not to mention preparing yourself for those erratic sleep patterns. Almost at once though, you will have noticed that there are some times when those basic needs have been attended to and your baby is awake and ready to know more about the new world he or she has come into. It is those times that can perhaps leave you wondering what to do next – how do you play, occupy and interact with such a tiny bundle? – and what happened to the baby instruction manual!

So that's where this e-book is designed to help. Here you will find a range of suggestions on ways to fill those moments with simple playful interactions that both you and your baby will love and that will provide all kinds of developmental benefits too for him or her too.

Before we go on, for ease of me writing and you reading I will alternate between using him and her when describing your baby in each section of the course, so you will only have to substitute the term that is right for you for half the time!

But What is the Importance of Play Time?

At this early stage in your baby's life, playtime is about slowly discovering her surroundings and learning all about herself. To do this she will use all her senses as well as experimenting with her body, little by little, finding out how it works and what she can do with it. From these foundations she will use the knowledge she is gaining to learn more and make further discoveries each and every day. In fact your child will learn more in her first 12 months than at any other time in her life, and it is through play that this learning is nurtured and honed so that your baby can flourish and develop in the best way possible for her.

Your role is that of your baby's first and most important playmate, and from the experiences and activities you share with her she will be able to make the most of the enormous potential she possesses to learn, grow and develop into a happy, healthy and confident child, ready to take on the world!



It is important to remember though that all your games and interactions should be at your baby's pace, so don't try to do much at once or before your baby is ready. As well as play times to stimulate and engage her, your baby also needs plenty of time to just observe and quietly process all the new stimuli she is experiencing. So if she is peaceful and content, give her a few minutes before interrupting her thoughts, then simply give her a cuddle, lots of smiles and talk softly to her about what is going on all around.

Playing with your child is one of the most wonderful and rewarding things about being a parent, and although you will find lots of suggestions within this e-book, always follow your own instincts about what is best for your child at any given time. Use the ideas as a starting point and amend, expand or adapt to make them work for your baby and your own unique situation. Above all, have some fun and enjoy this precious time you are sharing.

Getting to Know You Games

Play times in the early days of your baby's life are the ideal time for both of you to get to know each other better.

Simply by holding and cuddling your baby, gazing into his eyes, stroking his skin, and gently moving and swaying with him you are both finding out all sorts of things about each other and building a strong bond between you.



Baby Cues

Even from newborn, babies have ways of communicating their needs and wants, and though some of these might be quite subtle, the more you focus on observing what are known as your baby's cues the more easily you will pick up on and be able to respond to those needs. These can include facial expressions, the movements of the eyes, tongue, head and body, and also particular sounds. Your baby will have particular ways of telling you that he or she is hungry, tired, ready to play, or not, and lots more. Crying is an obvious way that your baby will demand your attention, but it is usually a late cue, when other signs have gone unnoticed.

So how will you know when it is time to play?

When your baby wants to interact with you he will instinctively use what are known as engagement cues. These may include holding your gaze with wide open eyes, or staring intently at an object as if trying to memorize it. Baby's face and body will be relaxed and movements smooth. As he gets older you may find that your baby will smile or reach out to try to touch or taste whatever interests them. If he is very excited you may find your baby kicks his legs and jiggles about!

When you see these cues you will know that your baby wants to learn more about you and about the world all around, so you can respond with simple games such as the following;

- Sit with your baby propped up on your knees, about 20-30cm from you and simply make eye contact, smile and talk.
- Try making different facial expressions, such as smiling, frowning, sticking out your tongue and blinking your eyes for him to first watch and later try to imitate.
- Move your face slowly from side to side, and then away from and towards your baby so that he can follow the movements with his eyes or head.
- Try these games sitting in front of a mirror with your baby on your lap facing away from you too so that he can see himself as well as you as you play.

Keep Play Times Short

It is also important to recognize when your baby has had enough of playing and needs a break, and this may be after just a few minutes in the early days. So keep watching out for those cues all the way through your play time. When you see your baby close his or her eyes, turn his face or body away from you or twist or arch it he is telling you that he no longer wants to engage with you or play that particular game. Other signs, known as disengagement cues, may be holding limbs stiffly, frowning or grimacing and perhaps looking as if he is about to cry.



The more quickly you respond to your baby's cues, whether around play time, feeding, sleeping or anything else, the more you build trust between the two of you. The more your baby trusts you to meet his needs, the more secure he feels to play and explore his environment. As you learn to understand your baby's unique form of communication you will also learn the most effective ways to calm and soothe him when needed, and as babies find it a lot easier to learn when they are calm, the more quickly and easily he will be able to discover and learn new things as you have fun together.

Body Basics

Your baby has little control over her movements, or understanding of how her body fits together at birth, but due to her naturally inquisitive nature will almost immediately start to experiment with what she can do to find out more.

You have a big part to play in helping your baby get to know her body, and a great way to start is with some gentle loving touches and movements.

Try some of these and see what your baby enjoys;

- Using both hands stroke slowly down your baby's body from head to toe, keeping eye contact with her as you go. This can be done either over clothing or, where possible, when baby is undressed. Repeat two or three times.
- Using a feather, or soft piece of fabric tickle or stroke over different parts of your baby's body. After each tickle kiss the part of the body that the feather or fabric has touched and tell your baby what it is called. Use your baby's name each time you do this to keep her attention focused on what you are doing, ie "This is Jessica's shoulder".
- Use a mirror to show your baby her beautiful face. Touch her nose, stroke her hair and gently pinch her ears as you talk to her about each one.
- Hold on to your baby's hands and slowly stretch out her arms, first out in front of her, then above her head and then out to her sides. Never force these movements and don't completely straighten the arms to begin with. You will be able to increase these stretches over time. Try also stretching out the legs.



To progress on from these simple starting points you may want to consider learning some baby massage and also baby yoga techniques to enjoy with your baby, both of which can help her get to know her body, strengthen her muscles and help her learn to control her movements, in ways that are appropriate to her age and stage of development. Massage and yoga can also help to reduce colic symptoms, regulate sleep patterns and much more. You can learn lots more about both of these with the Tots Play [Baby Play and Development Online Course](#) or by joining [Tots Play classes](#).



Take a look at these two videos from the [Baby Play and Development Online course](#) introducing some massage techniques;

[Starting the Massage Routine](#)
[Massage Routine for the Legs](#)

Find out more about the course [HERE](#).

Moving and Grooving

Every time your baby is moving he is learning. Not only is he finding out more about his body, he is also learning about concepts such as gravity, balance, depth and distance, co-ordination, cause and effect and spatial awareness.

Practicing and repeating a variety of movement activities with your baby will therefore boost both physical and cognitive development – and they are a great way to have fun together too!

Simply swaying, rocking and swinging your baby gently in your arms is a great way to get started, and provides a range of different stimulation for him. Carrying him in a sling as you go about your day is also an ideal way for your baby to gain the benefits of being in motion, while also being close to you. The combination of these two things can also help to calm and soothe him if he is a little fussy.

As your baby grows try introducing some different types of movement such as;

- Lifting him high in the air and then swinging him down towards the ground
- Holding him in your arms as you spin around on the spot
- Helping him to roll over from front to back and back to front
- Holding him close to your body, then stretch your arms in front so he is further away. Move him towards and away from you a few times.



Using music along with movement is a great way to enhance your play time and brings even more benefits for your baby. Put on some music and dance with your baby in your arms or sing simple songs to him (don't worry if you don't think you have a good voice, to your baby it is the sweetest sound in the world!). As well as being lots of fun, singing songs and rhymes with your baby also help to develop language and memory, creativity and imagination, co-ordination and rhythm and build listening and concentration skills, which are fundamental to learning. Combining songs with actions and movements, such as those above is the ideal brain and body boosting play time for your baby.



Watch another video from the [Baby Play and Development Online course](#) and have some fun trying out the movements to our specially written song, Twirling All Around!

[Twirling All Around Video](#)

Find out more about the course [HERE](#).

Brain Boosters

When a baby is born her body is fully developed but her brain is not. In order for it to start working and growing, the cells of the brain need to communicate with each other. As your baby starts to experience life, connections are made between the cells - the more connections there are, the more the brain develops and the more your baby is able to do. As experiences are repeated so those connections grow stronger and become permanent.

A baby's brain has the capacity to develop so fast that by age two a child who is developing normally, and is exposed to a wide range of experiences, has the same number of connection as an adult. By age three, this number has doubled.

You have a big part to play in what your baby experiences and therefore the way and the rate at which her brain develops. The good news is the more fun you have on the way the better.



All the activities we have talked about so far, such as touch, movement and music will have a positive effect on your baby's brain development, and the more consistently your baby experiences these the greater the benefits, but it is also important to continue to expose your baby to new experiences so that new connections and pathways in the brain can be built. Try a few of these ideas to keep building that brain power;

- Tip her upside down. Do this by laying your baby on her back on your outstretched legs, with her head close to your ankles. Holding her securely, slowly start to bend your knees keeping your feet on the ground so that your baby's head is lower than the rest of her body, hold the position for a few seconds and then lower your knees down again.
- Practise crossing the midline. The midline is an imaginary line that runs down the body separating it in half vertically. Crossing the midline, means that part of the body from one side crosses to the other, for example when you use your right hand to scratch your left ear. Crossing the midline forces the left and right sides of the brain to communicate and work together, strengthening the pathways that link the two sides. Try crossing your baby's legs over one another or reaching one of her arms across to the opposite side of her body, then the other arm to the other side.
- Peek-a-boo games. These are a great way to help your baby learn that things continue to exist even when they can't be seen, and to use her cognitive skills to anticipate when you might peek out!
- Take your baby out and about. Try to visit different places so that she has new things to see, hear, smell and touch.



In this video from the [Baby Play and Development Online](#) course you can try the inverted position, great for boosting brain power!

[Dabbling Ducks Video](#)

Find out more about the course [HERE](#).

Simple Sensory Play

Babies use all their senses to learn and start to understand more about the world around them from the moment they are born, and in some ways even before this. So today and tomorrow you will find some ideas for simple ways to stimulate your baby's senses during play times.

As adults we tend to rely more heavily on one or two of our senses at a time. For your baby, however, the more of his senses that are in use at once, the easier it is for him to process and understand his new environment, as more information is being fed to the brain about what he is experiencing. When you are playing with your baby, it is therefore worth taking a moment to think about how his senses will be interpreting the information that the activity is providing and trying to include stimulation for as many of his senses as possible.

So let's think about your baby's different senses and how you can provide stimulation to heighten your baby's awareness of these during your play times.

Touch

Touch is the first sense to develop in the womb and the most highly developed of the senses at birth. Your touch, especially skin to skin contact, is one of the most soothing experiences for your baby. He will also seek other things to touch, not just with his hands but with his whole body and especially his mouth which is one of the most sensitive areas of the body and provides all kinds of information about what he is touching, whether it is hard, soft, warm, cold, smooth, rough etc. Try some of these ways to help your baby explore the sense of touch.

- Experiment with different types of touch. Stroke, pat and rub your baby's skin on different parts of his body to see which he responds most too. Practicing baby massage is also a wonderful way to share these loving touches with your baby. (if you missed the videos on Baby Massage earlier watch them now [HERE](#) and [HERE](#))
- As you are holding your baby encourage him to explore the feel of your hair and the clothes you are wearing.
- Introduce your baby to different textures from around the house, perhaps the cushions on the sofa, a wooden spoon or a metal saucepan. Talk about how these might feel - soft, smooth, cold etc.



Sight

At birth your baby can only focus on things that are close to him, ideally around 10 inches away, and he shows a preference for looking at faces over anything else. He will also be drawn to objects with bright primary colours or high contrast such as black and white patterns.

Have fun with your baby as you stimulate his sense of sight by;

- Taking a tour around your house and showing him different things. Hold him close to the colourful curtains, pictures on the wall or books on the bookcase and talk to him about each one.
- Using a thick black marker pen draw simple patterns on white paper or card and let your baby take his time looking at them. As babies are naturally drawn towards faces, a circle shape with dots or lines to represent eyes, nose and mouth will fascinate him.
- Hold a colourful toy in front of your baby's face and when you have his attention slowly move it from side to side so he can follow its path with his eyes.



Smell

Babies have a strong sense of smell and your scent, in particular, is a very important part of how your baby gets to know you in the first days of her life. Your unique smell can provide her with comfort even when you are not with her, for example by placing an article of clothing that you have recently worn close to her. Be careful not to mask your scent by using heavily fragranced lotions or perfume, either on yourself or your baby in those first few weeks.

We do not often think of bringing the sense of smell in to play time, but is a simple and effective way of extending your baby's knowledge and understanding of the world. Why not...

- Let your baby smell anything you are cooking that has a strong or interesting aroma.
- When you are outside point out smells such as freshly cut grass or flowers in the garden.
- Describe the smell she is experiencing, is it fresh, earthy, or perhaps sweet.



Hearing

Although your baby will pick up on lots of different sounds around her, and will recognise your voice in particular, in the early days it is not easy for her to distinguish individual sounds. It is especially difficult for her to work out the difference between what we would consider background noise and other, more prominent, sounds. She will therefore find it much easier to focus on you talking or singing to her, or on a particular sound, when it is otherwise quiet in the room.



To help her get the most from listening try;

- Talking to her with “motherese”. This is the way that most parents naturally speak to their baby, with a higher pitch and sing-song rhythm, exaggerated consonant and drawn out vowel sounds, and using simple, short sentences. Take this one step further by using your voice in different ways, varying the pitch, tone and volume as you talk to her.
- Sing and playing different types of music. Whatever you think of your singing voice to your baby it is the sweetest sound in the world. Sing or play lots of different types of music for her, from nursery rhymes to classical, to your favourite pop music. Your baby will recognise sounds and especially songs that she was used to hearing while in the womb, and may find certain music or sounds familiar and comforting (even the theme tune to your favourite soap opera!). Make your musical play time even more fun and interactive by dance around the room holding your baby in your arms and making the pace and style of your movements appropriate to the music you are listening to.
- Narrate your baby’s day. Keep talking to your baby, describing all the things you are doing and what you can see, hear or feel as you go through the day. This also helps to building language skills as your baby learns about the rhythm and pattern of speech, as well as over time starting to recognise words she hears repeated many times.

Talking and singing to your baby are two great ways to help your baby learn about language and communication. It is not too early to start to introduce some simple sign language to emphasise important words for your baby, and in a few months time, long before she is able to communicate using words she will be able to use these gestures to let you know her thoughts, feelings and interests. Sign language is another of the topics included in the [Tots Play Baby Play and Development Online Course](#).



Try this song introducing some simple signs you can use to help communicate with your baby.

[Drink My Milk Video](#)

Find out more about the course [HERE](#).



What Next?

So that brings us to the end of this introduction to play time with your baby. I hope you have had fun with some of the different activities that have been suggested.

You can learn much more about the techniques and activities we have been talking about and how to build them in to your play sessions with the Tots Play [Baby Play and Development Online Course](#). This includes 10 content packed modules with 30 easy to follow video tutorials, 20 music tracks to download, plus written explanations and pictures of the techniques and activities and lots more. Get all the details and access to the course [HERE](#).

You will also find a wide range of resources to help you get the most from play time in the [Tots Play Online Store](#).

Of course we would also love to see you at Tots Play classes where you can enjoy all these activities and more each week. You can find out more about the [programme of classes](#) and search for your nearest classes [HERE](#).

If there are no classes near you yet why not think about starting your own! The Tots Play [Franchise Opportunity](#) offers a flexible, affordable and fun business where you can bring in a great income working around your family – yes really! Find out more [HERE](#).

Thank you so much for taking the time to learn more about some of the benefits of enjoying regular play times with your baby. But this is just the start of your journey through play. Every day brings the opportunity for new and exciting discoveries for your baby to make, and the chance for you to have even more fun together, as you help him or her develop into a happy, healthy child. So wherever that journey takes you, happy playing!

Helen

Founder of Tots Play

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