

# What to do at Home with a Newborn – 10 Ways to Engage with your Baby

You've enjoyed (or endured) the pregnancy, given birth and now find yourself at home alone with a tiny baby. So what happens next?



The first few days at home with your new baby may well be littered with visits from family and friends but pretty soon you can find yourself facing empty days and wondering what on earth you should do with your gorgeous but helpless little bundle. These moments are supposed to be precious and special, but what are you actually supposed to do?

Our early childhood experts offer baby activity ideas.

In these first days and weeks with a newborn, feeding, rocking, navigating sleeping, and nappy changes occupy so much of the day.

Just a week or two before the birth you may have been a driven, highly motivated, business woman with an action-packed schedule. It takes a bit of getting used to by try to accept this as the pace of life for now and sleep when your baby sleeps - if you can.

Although it may take a while to find your rhythm, eventually you'll notice a pattern in your baby's needs, and you can settle into a more relaxed routine based on your newborn's schedule.

This is a time for you and your family to get to know your baby and similarly your baby is learning to know you - what you look like, smell like, feel like...that you are trustworthy and dependable...that they are cared for and loved...that there is some predictability in life...and that others besides you may also be trustworthy.

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So when you do find times when your baby is fed, changed, awake, and content, what can you actually do with your baby?

- **Follow your baby's lead.** This is a good starting point. Watch what she is interested in and follow up on that. If your baby turns and looks when she hears a rattle, for example, repeat the sound again.
- **Mimic communication.** Babies learn language through the reciprocity of communication. Your baby coos, you coo back. Your baby waves her arms, you wave back.
- **Engage with your baby.** Faces are of great interest to babies. They won't be able to see very far initially but may enjoy looking into your eyes. Eye contact is a great way to connect with your baby. When you are engaged face-to-face, eye-to-eye, talk to your baby. While they won't initially understand the words, your tone is important. Listening to your words will eventually help your baby make a connection between what you say and the meaning.
- **Get on your baby's level.** Lay out a mat or blanket and get on the floor with your baby. Gather some toys, mirrors or sensory toys to explore together.
- **Develop your baby's neck strength.** As your baby builds neck control, provide small bursts of tummy time to help strengthen your baby's trunk, neck, and arm muscles. Some babies don't like a lot of time on their tummies. Start for just a minute or so and build up slowly. Always closely supervise, and if your child appears sleepy move them back to the crib on their back.
- **Read to your newborn.** Hold your baby on your lap and read material and board books together. Point to pictures in the book and name them.
- **Incorporate your baby into your routine.** Carry your child around your house and engage them in your daily routine; show them things and name them. ("This is where our dog sleeps. And this is where we keep the dishes.") If you have never done this before, you may feel self-conscious at first, but it is a great way for your child to learn your voice and lay the foundations for speech development.
- **Learn how long to hold your child.** Each child has their threshold of 'holding' time. Some prefer more, while others desire less. Learn to recognise your child's cues so you can give them the support they need, when they need it.
- **Singing.** Whether you think you have a nice voice or not, your child will enjoy listening to your voice as you sing simple songs or recite rhymes you remember from your childhood. If you don't enjoy singing, listen to different types of music together and see which your baby prefers.
- **Sibling Involvement.** If you have other children include your baby in their routines. This provides its own wonderful experience for all. In fact, it is usually siblings who get the best reactions from babies!

Remember that every child is different. If you have a baby who sleeps only a little, your days will be very

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different from parents whose child sleeps a lot. If this is your first child, your day will be different than those who are navigating schedules of several older siblings.

Just remember you don't need special or scheduled time to play with your baby. In fact, the best time to sing, talk, and interact is when you are engaged in the every day routines like holding, feeding, bathing, changing nappies.

And most importantly of all, as you transition into this phase of life, a fascinating period that comes with its own joys and challenges, recognise that this is an adjustment time-for your newborn and also for you. Don't put excessive pressure on yourself to 'do' stuff and just try to enjoy this unique time of life