



# Healthy Children Ready to Learn

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## 4 MONTHS OLD

Dear Parents . . .  
Your baby is beginning to  
explore his world!

*HAVE* you noticed how your baby responds to you with smiles and thinks that everything is a game? How he sometimes seems shy or afraid? From now on, you'll find that your baby uses all his senses — sight, sound, smell, taste



and touch — to learn about the world around him. You can help him explore his world by playing, holding, talking, singing and spending time with him. What could be more exciting and

rewarding than watching your baby develop a personality all his own?



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# WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE 4 MONTHS OLD?

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## How I Grow

- I turn my head in all directions.
- I lift my head forward when I'm on my back and grab my feet with my hands.
- I sit up for about 15 minutes with my head and back straight if you support my body.
- I prefer sitting, instead of lying down — it's more interesting!
- I roll from my back to my side, but sometimes I get my hand caught under my stomach.
- I stretch my legs out straight when I'm on my back or my stomach.
- I move a toy from one hand to the other.
- I put things in my mouth.
- I splash and kick with my hands and feet in the bath.

## How I Talk

- I babble and imitate sounds like coughing and clicking my tongue for long periods of time.
- I coo, grin or squeal with joy when you talk to me.

## How I Respond

- I love to see myself in the mirror.
- I'm fascinated by my hands.
- I like some people and am shy or scared of others.
- I may have one favorite toy or blanket.

## How I Understand

- I can remember things for about five seconds.
- I know if something is near or far.
- I'm aware of depth and distance.

## How I Feel

- I get excited when I'm having fun — everything is a game to me.
- I cry and get mad when you stop paying attention to me or take a toy away.

# Q&A

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“Whenever my baby cries, I pick him up. My friend says I’m spoiling him. Is she right?”

Most child specialists agree that you are not spoiling your baby when you react promptly to his crying. A baby’s needs are usually immediate. If he is hungry, he wants to be fed. If he is uncomfortable or scared, he wants to be held.

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Your baby needs a lot of love from YOU — the most important person in the world to him.

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You don’t have to worry about spoiling him. Answering his needs makes him feel safe, loved and worthwhile.

Not answering his needs and ignoring him may teach him that the world is not to be trusted. The basic need for trust is the foundation for self-discipline. It’s necessary for his growth into a well-adjusted, caring human being.

## A special word for fathers...

*You* are very important to your baby. Fathers who love and take care of their children are just as important as caring mothers to their child’s happiness, well-being and future success in school. Often, fathers play with their children in a physical way. Active play stimulates children, improves their motor skills and helps organize their brains.

When you are involved in the everyday tasks of taking care of your baby, you will probably feel good about being a parent. Your children are more likely to be successful, too. So get involved. You and your baby will benefit.

# FEEDING YOUR BABY

*After 4 to 6 months, your baby will be ready to eat solid foods, in addition to breast milk or formula.*

## WHEN TO FEED

More and more pediatricians recommend that babies not be given solid food until at least 4 months of age, and preferably that parents wait until 6 months to begin feeding cereals and other solid foods. The reason: before 4 months, babies do not have full mouth and tongue control and will usually push solids out with their tongues. Therefore, semi-liquids and mushy foods should not be given to your baby before she can sit up with support or has some head and neck control. Check with your doctor, nurse or clinic before beginning solid foods.



For the first few weeks, offer the cereal once or twice a day after breast or bottle feeding. Use a baby-sized spoon to feed your baby. Give her just a small taste at first. If she seems interested, give her a few more tastes with the spoon. If she doesn't like it or pushes the spoon away, wait a few weeks and then try again.

Don't force your baby to eat. She will accept solids when she is ready.

Try only one new food at a time. For example, if you start with a few teaspoons of infant rice cereal, continue for several days before introducing oatmeal or infant barley.

The first feedings will probably be messy. Don't forget, your baby has only been used to sucking up to now; but she will soon learn how to swallow solids. With a little patience, you can help your baby learn to eat and to like different foods. Try to make mealtime a pleasant time for both of you!

Sometimes a new food can cause diarrhea, a skin rash or even a runny nose. If you think your baby has an allergy problem, check with your doctor, nurse or clinic.

## WHAT TO FEED

After four to six months, your baby will be ready for other foods in addition to breast milk or formula. Usually an iron-fortified infant cereal from a box is first. Start with rice cereal because most babies are not allergic to rice. After a few days, try oatmeal or barley. Try only one new food at a time. Soon your baby will be ready for a few teaspoons of pureed vegetables and fruits.

## HOW TO FEED

Put a teaspoon of infant cereal in a dish (not in the bottle) and mix it with formula milk or breast milk. Don't add sugar, salt or any seasonings.



*I can move to keep things in sight*

# GAMES BABIES PLAY

## An Eyes-and-Body Game

### PURPOSE OF GAME

- Teaches your baby to use his body, and to lift his head and part of his upper body when watching a moving object.

### HOW TO PLAY

- Put your baby on his stomach and sit facing him.
- Use a ring of keys, or a box or can filled with buttons or rocks.
- Dangle the noise-making object in front of your baby's face and say, "Look at the keys."

- Raise the object slowly in the air to encourage him to lift his head and push up with his hands.
- Say something like "Follow the keys" or "Keep your eyes on the keys."
- Watch your baby and see if he can lift his chest off the floor.

### ANOTHER GAME

- Move objects slowly behind your baby's head. See if he will move around to find the object.

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# WATCH OUT!

MAKE SURE ALL TOYS OR OBJECTS GIVEN TO  
YOUR BABY ARE SAFE

*Here* are some thoughts to keep in mind when considering toys for your baby, as recommended by the National Safety Council.

Toys should be:

- Washable.
- Large enough so that they won't fit in your baby's mouth, ear or nose.
- Light enough so they won't cause injury if your baby drops them on himself.
- Made of non-brittle material (never glass).

Here are some suggestions for safety in toys:

- Avoid toys with spikes or wires in them.
- Make sure toys have no parts that can catch fingers.
- Check to see that toys are labeled nontoxic.
- Remove any loose metal squeakers from squeak toys.
- Remove the eyes on stuffed animals if they are loose or pinned on. Add your own touch by embroidering eyes on the animal.
- Avoid hanging pacifiers or toys from long strings above your baby's bed. They can come loose and get tangled around your baby's neck. Don't hang them around his neck either.



**Don't Give Plastic Bags or Balloons to  
Your Baby as Playthings!**

*Does your stomach* feel tense? Do you often get headaches? Do your muscles ache? Do you sometimes feel like hitting someone? Or crying for no reason? These are some of the signs of stress — AND YOU CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT THEM.

Everyone goes through stress or strain at one time or another. Stress builds up from daily worries, from crisis, from life changes — like becoming a new parent, or getting divorced or changing jobs. For some people, it can build up to the point where they can no longer control their emotions or where they strike out at the world around them.

It's easy to ignore the first signs of stress. But if you listen to your body and to your feelings, you can learn to read the warning signals and take action to reduce tension. Here are some suggestions, stress-reducing exercises, places you can contact and other information that can help.

## SUGGESTIONS

- Put your baby down for a nap and forget what you “should” be doing. Take sometime to RELAX. Do whatever makes you feel fresh again.
- Don't keep worry and anger bottled up. Talk about these feelings with someone who is close to you.
- Set reasonable goals for yourself. Then decide what first steps you REALLY want to take.

- Trying to do everything, plus taking care of your baby, will wear you out. Pick out the most important things and don't worry about the others.

## EXERCISES

- Raise your shoulders up to your ears. Hold while counting to four, then drop your shoulders back to their normal position. Rotate your shoulders back, down and around, first one way, then the other. Repeat a few times.
- Lie on the floor with your feet up on a chair. Place a cool wash cloth on your face and think of the most peaceful scene you can imagine. Stay there for at least five minutes.

## PLACES TO GET HELP

- If you are worried that your feelings are getting out of hand, call PARENTHELPLINE, a 24-hour toll-free hotline. You don't have to give your name. You can get advice, help or just talk to someone. The line also serves as the state's DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE. Victims may call for help in finding a safe place. The toll-free number is 1-800-356-6767. Bilingual counselors are available for Latino families.
- Another place you can get information about domestic violence is the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence Web site at [www.ncadv.org](http://www.ncadv.org) or you can call the NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE at 1-800-799 SAFE (7233).

If you have any questions or comments, please contact the Extension Family and Consumer Sciences agent at your county UT Extension office.

COMING  
NEXT

In... HEALTHY CHILDREN  
READY TO LEARN

- Discipline, It Starts Early
- Teething is the Pits



**HEALTHY CHILDREN READY TO LEARN** was originally developed as the **Parent Express** series by the University of California Cooperative Extension Service. The material was adapted for use in Tennessee by Janie Burney, Professor, Family and Consumer Sciences. Contact Denise Brandon, Associate Professor, Family and Consumer Sciences, for information on this publication.

## RESOURCES

### From a Bookstore or Library

*Raising a Happy Unspoiled Child* by Burton L. White, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1994.

*Touchpoints: Your Child's Emotional and Behavioral Development* by T. Berry Brazelton, Perseus Publishing, New York, 1992.

*What to Expect the First Year*, by Arlene Eisenberg, et al., Workman Publishing Co., New York, 1989.

*Child of Mine: Feeding With Love and Good Sense* (3rd Edition) by Elyn Satter, Bull Publishing Co., Palo Alto, CA, 2000.

*How to Get Your Kid to Eat . . . But Not Too Much* by Elyn Satter, Bull Publishing Co., Palo Alto, CA, 1987.

### From the Extension Office

*Preparing Formula for Your Baby*, SP445-A, by Janie Burney, The University of Tennessee Extension, 2005.

*When Is Your Baby Ready for Solid Food?*, SP445-B, by Janie Burney, The University of Tennessee Extension, 2000.

*Making Your Own Baby Food*, SP445-C, by Janie Burney, University of Tennessee Agricultural Extension Service, 2000.

*Tips on Infant Feeding: 4-6 Months*, SP 445-D, by Janie Burney, University of Tennessee Extension, 2001.

### From the Internet

[www.utextension.utk.edu](http://www.utextension.utk.edu)

<http://fcs.tennessee.edu>

[www.cyfernet.org](http://www.cyfernet.org)

[www.parentsaction.org](http://www.parentsaction.org)

[www.civitas.org](http://www.civitas.org)

[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

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