# Your Baby's Growing Brain!

Every parent or caregiver knows they only have a short time while their children are young. But did you know that your child's brain is growing and learning at a speed it will never again experience during this time? In fact, the human brain begins forming very early in its mother's womb, just three weeks after conception. By the age of three, a baby's brain has reached almost 90 percent of its adult size!

In order for your child to make the most of its extraordinary mind, it is very important for him or her to be nurtured and stimulated during this time. Everything she or he sees, touches, tastes, smells or hears helps to shape the brain for thinking, feeling, moving and learning. What happens in the first years of your child's life will have a lasting effect as your child grows into an adult.

A young child's brain is more open to learning, but it is also more vulnerable to developmental problems during this time. A lack of a nurturing environment or other basic needs can have an impact on a child as he or she grows into an adult. Babies grow and learn best when responsive and caring parents and other caregivers give them affection, attention and stimulation in addition to good nutrition, health care and protection.

Young children can experience excessive stress if they are neglected or abused. These stresses can interfere with the developing brain and can lead to cognitive, social and emotional delays and behavior problems in childhood and later.

But when a caregiver plays, sings, speaks, reads or tells a story to the child and nurtures her or him with healthy food, love and affection, the child's brain grows.

Parents and caregivers play the most important role in a young child's developing brain. When children are nurtured and encouraged to play and explore, they learn and develop socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually. Encouraging and supporting your baby's developing body and mind is the first step in preparing your child to succeed in school and in life.



**SOURCE:** www.factsforlifeglobal.org, stateofopportunity.michiganradio.org, main.zerotothree.org, developingchild.harvard.edu, childwelfare.gov

# Tips to Boost your Baby's Brain!

1. **Play games that involve the hands** (patty-cake, peekaboo, this little piggy). Babies respond well to learning simple sequential games.

2. **Be attentive.** When your baby points, be sure to follow with your gaze and remark on items or events of interest to her. This "joint attention" confirms for your baby how important her interests and observations are to you.

3. **Foster an early passion for books.** Choose books with large and colorful pictures, and share your baby's delight in pointing and making noise. For example, say the animal sounds to go along with farm pictures.

4. **Choose developmentally appropriate toys that allow babies to explore and interact.** Toys such as a windup jack-in-the-box or stackable blocks help your baby learn cause-and-effect relationships.

5. **Respond promptly when your baby cries.** Soothe, nurture, cuddle, and reassure him so that you build positive links in the areas of the brain that impact emotions.

6. **Build trust by being attentive and focused.** Babies who are securely attached to you emotionally will be able to invest more energy in the pleasures of exploration, learning, and discovery.

7. **Set up a safe environment for your crawling baby or toddler.** Spatial learning is important, and your mobile child will begin to understand concepts like under, over, near, and far.

8. **Sing songs** such as "Itsy Bitsy Spider" and "Ring-Around-the-Rosy." The body motions and finger play will help your baby integrate sounds with large and small movements. Songs also enhance your child's learning of rhythms, rhymes, and language patterns.

9. **Use positive discipline.** Create clear consequences without frightening or causing shame to your child. If your toddler acts inappropriately, such as by hitting another child, get down to his eye level, use a low, serious tone of voice, and clearly restate the rule. Keep rules simple, consistent, and reasonable for your child's age.

10. **Express joy and interest in your baby.** Use body language, eye contact, attentiveness, touch and smile when interacting with your baby.



SOURCE: www.scholastic.com