

# 0-3 month guide

**Your baby's brain development,  
crying and how to get them settled**



## Congratulations on your newborn!

You've probably prepared yourself for this moment and have read one hundred and one books about what to expect in these first three months. You probably also know that no matter how many books you read, nothing can ever prepare you for when your parenthood journey begins. To help you with the journey, we've put together a helpful guide that you can pick up and refer to during these initial months. Take the information that you need, leave the bits you don't, just remember to take every day at a time and don't sweat the small stuff.





# Baby's brain development

**Babies are intelligent learners, especially when interacting with those that love and care for them. Be available during their awake time and always respond positively to your baby with lots of cuddles and attention.**

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## Your baby's brain

We now know a lot more about baby's early brain development thanks to research and the development of technologies such as PET (positron emission tomography) and MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scans. The early years of a child's life are when your baby's brain sets down the blueprint for their future.

### 1. Provide a secure base

During the first three years of life, your baby's brain will undergo an incredibly rapid period of development. A baby's brain needs exposure to simple everyday skills and experiences to help gain a strong sense of security and a secure base. One of your roles as a parent is to be a reliable source of comfort for your baby.

### 2. Stay in tune with your baby

By noticing little things about your baby's facial expressions, their body language and emotions you will feel more connected to your baby and understand what they're trying to tell you. For example:

- When they're feeding and grasp your finger and look into your eyes.
- When you receive your first recognisable smile.
- When they follow you around the room with their eyes.
- When they have an intense conversation with you, making sounds, leaving spaces for you to talk and respond.



## Enhancing your baby's development

- Babies love books and music. Research shows they can help your baby's brain development, so talk, sing and read to your baby from an early age.
- Support your newborn baby by helping them settle to sleep in a caring and responsive way to minimise distress.
- Babies respond well to having a routine or pattern to their day as routines make the world more predictable, but routines need to be flexible and baby-led wherever possible.

## Baby milestones

'Milestones' is a term used to describe the development expectations at specific time periods. Here's a guideline to some 'milestones' you can expect from your baby between birth and three months. Remember that all children are different and develop at their own pace.



## Birth

- No or minimal head control.
  - When held in a sitting position, their back is curved, and their head will fall forward.
  - Close their eyes to sudden light.
  - May focus on a slowly moving object 22 to 30cm away in a range of 45 degrees
  - Will gaze at a face or object within 22 to 30cm.
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## Around 1 month

- When lying on their back, keep head to one side.
  - Hands are predominantly closed.
  - Moves arms and legs in large jerky movements.
  - Gaze caught and held by a bright dangling object gently moved in their line of vision.
  - Gazes at an object that is slowly moved towards and away from their face.
  - Turns to a diffused light source, e.g. a lamp
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## Around 3 months

- Has good head control.
  - Hands loosely open.
  - Needs shoulder supported when being bathed or dressed.
  - Lying on their front, they can lift their head and front portion of their chest to a 90-degree angle, taking their weight on the forearms.
  - Can start to sit for short periods of time in a well-supported sitting position.
  - Waves arms symmetrically.
  - Shows a desire to grasp an object.
  - If a rattle is placed in their hand, baby will actively hold onto it.
  - Grasp is no longer a reflex; it is now a voluntary action.
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If you are ever concerned about any aspect of your child's development, contact your Child and Family Health Nurse or GP.







# Why do babies cry?

In the first 3 months, crying is the best way your baby has to communicate their urgent needs. You can work out how urgent your baby's cry is by the pitch and urgency, but you won't know what's causing your baby to cry. To get one step closer to the source or reason, you can classify their crying by emotional or physical need.

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## Emotional need

In the first 3 months, your baby's cry can act as an alert to tell you that they need to re-establish close, physical contact with you. This is why your baby will fuss and cry when they can't see, hear or feel you. An emotional need means your baby needs help managing feelings because babies are too young to do that on their own.

### These can be feelings of:

- Loneliness.
- Anger.
- Fear.
- Sadness.
- Overstimulation.

When you respond to your baby's cries quickly with reassurance, warmth and affection they'll feel safe and secure and usually calm down more quickly. This is vital in helping your baby's brain to grow and develop in a healthy way. Your baby may also cry as a response to physical stimulus.



### **Physical reasons for crying may include:**

- A nappy change.
- A feed.
- A sleep.
- A tummy upset.
- Being hot or cold.

Your very young baby is having lots of new physical and emotional experiences that can be exhausting for them. When your baby gets overwhelmed and cries it also has a very powerful effect on you and can trigger physical/psychological reactions and distress. This is normal and as nature intended, otherwise you wouldn't go and help your baby!

### **The best ways to respond to your distressed baby are:**

- Make sure you are calm yourself.
- Use a soothing calm voice.
- Sing a soothing song.
- Show your baby your face and eyes.
- Gently touch and cuddle your baby.
- Rock your baby by swaying side to side very gently.
- Swaddle your baby's arms in the wrap to make sure they're not startling themselves with waving arms.
- Use gentle, slow repetitious patting.

Some people still believe that you will encourage your baby to cry more if you pick your baby up when they cry – this is not true. It's important to know that you are not spoiling your baby by picking your baby up when they cry. The more experienced you become in responding to your baby, observing your baby's non-verbal communications and trying out ways to soothe your baby, the better you'll understand what your baby is trying to tell you.





# Settling your baby

**For many new parents, there is nothing more peaceful than a sleeping baby. Unfortunately, reality is not so generous - with newborns, sleep and settling problems are very common. Learning about your baby's sleeping matters and knowing how to settle a baby may help alleviate your stress and help your baby develop good sleeping habits.**

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## **In the early weeks try settling baby in your arms:**

1. Hold your baby in your arms until they fall asleep.
2. Use gentle rhythmic patting, rocking, stroking, talking, or softly singing before putting your baby into the cot asleep. These repetitions signal relaxation and sleep.
3. If your baby wakes after a sleep cycle you may need to re-settle.

## **We also recommend hands-on settling:**

1. Talk quietly and cuddle your baby to make baby calm
2. Put your baby on their back in the cot awake [calm/drowsy]
3. Comfort your baby with gentle 'ssshhh' sounds, gentle rhythmic patting, rocking, or stroking until baby is calm or asleep
4. If your baby becomes or stays distressed pick your baby up for a cuddle until calm or asleep before putting baby back in the cot
5. Stay with your baby until he/she is asleep

We recommend wrapping your baby with a light material (cotton) to help settle your baby. Make sure that the arms are above waist level and the legs are able to bend at the hips with knees apart. Ensure your baby is not over dressed and your baby's head is uncovered. Stop wrapping your baby when he/she is starting to show signs of beginning to roll over.

**Those were the ins and out's to keep in mind over the early months of your newborn's development. Remember that you are learning through this process just as they are, so be patient, be kind, look after yourself and don't be afraid to ask for a hand.**



The information in this guide was provided by Tresillian Australia

Tresillian Australia is Australia's largest Early Parenting Service offering professional advice, education and guidance to families with a baby, toddler, or pre-schooler.

For parenting advice in Australia call:  
The Tresillian Parent's Helpline  
1300 272 736

Visit the Tresillian website at:  
[www.tresillian.org.au](http://www.tresillian.org.au)  
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