healthy baby healthy brain

Tips for Parents – Brain Development

Did you know?

#	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
1	Preconception	Future mothers' health	Did you know that the brain of a future baby can be affected by the mother's health, even before she gets pregnant?
2	Preconception	Future fathers' health	Did you know that the brain of a future baby can be affected by the father's health, even before conception?
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4	Pregnancy	Exposures during pregnancy	Did you know that what you are exposed to during pregnancy can affect your unborn baby's brain?
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15	31-36 months	Helping your child cope	Did you know you can help your child develop self-regulation?

To help your baby have a healthy brain, visit this interactive website:
www.HealthyBabyHealthyBrain.ca

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#	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
1	Preconception	Future mothers' health	Did you know that the brain of a future baby can be affected by the mother's health, even before she gets pregnant?

It is best to make changes when you are thinking about becoming pregnant.
If you are planning a pregnancy, it is best to:

- Avoid alcohol.
- Avoid exposure to tobacco smoke.
- Talk to your health care provider or contact Motherisk about the drugs, vitamins and herbal treatments that you use.
- Stop using recreational drugs such as marijuana and cocaine. These may affect the quality of the eggs. The effects of recreational drugs may not be identified immediately after birth. The effects may show up at a later date in the form of learning disabilities.
- Make healthy food choices by following Canada's Food guide. This will affect how well your baby develops and grows and how healthy you feel.
- Reduce the risk of problems with your baby's brain and spine. Take a multivitamin with folic acid every day. Start at least three months before you get pregnant. Some women need more folic acid than others. Talk to a genetics counsellor or your health care provider for advice.
- Be active regularly. The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that adults get at least 2.5 hours of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week. Be active for at least 10 minutes or more at a time.
- Find out about your own health and your family's health history. High blood pressure, arthritis, depression, cancer, mumps, diabetes and Hepatitis B can affect your chances of having a healthy baby. Contact your health care provider or a genetics clinic if there are any family medical conditions you are concerned about such as severe allergies, heart malformations or mental health concerns.
- Take a look at the toxic substances that may be in your home, workplace and where you spend leisure time. These may include lead, mercury, solvents, cleaning products, pesticides, artificial fragrances and other toxins. Scientific research is done to better understand the effects of various chemicals. Some may affect hormones, ovules, sperm and the developing baby. When science can't be certain, caution is your best approach.
- If you are exposed to potentially harmful substances at work, talk with your employer about alternative arrangements.
- At home, decide if products such as harsh cleaners, air fresheners, dry cleaning chemicals and pesticides are really necessary. Consider using simple, non-toxic products, such as baking soda and vinegar, for routine cleaning. Arrange for others to perform tasks that could put you and your future baby in contact with harmful chemicals. One example is changing the vacuum cleaner bag.
- Avoid renovating your home if you may be pregnant or have young children. If renovation work must be done, plan to be away for the duration of the work. Return only once all dust has been thoroughly cleaned up and all fumes have cleared.
- Ensure your immunizations are up to date. Get immunized for chicken pox and rubella (German measles) if you have not had those infections.
- Get screened for sexually transmitted infections. Talk to your partner about sexually transmitted infections.

Now is a great time to make positive changes in your habits for both you and your partner. This will give you good health before you conceive, and create healthy habits for your future growing family.

Links

- *Is there a baby in your future? Plan for it.* Best Start Resource Centre. www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca
- *Creating Healthy Home Environments for Kids: Top 5 Tips.* Canadian Partnership for Children's Health & Environment. www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca
- Motherisk. 1-877-439-2744. www.motherisk.org

# 2	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	Preconception	Future fathers' health	Did you know that the brain of a future baby can be affected by the father's health, even before conception?

It is best to make changes when you are thinking about conceiving a baby.
If you are planning a pregnancy, it is best to:

- Stop using recreational drugs such as marijuana and cocaine. Drugs may increase the number of abnormal sperm. The effect of recreational drugs may not be identified immediately at birth. The effects may show up at a later date in the form of learning disabilities. It is safer to stop using recreational drugs before conceiving.
- Review your medication with your health care provider. Prescription and over-the-counter drugs can affect the quality and quantity of sperm. Herbal medicines and body-building supplements are drugs too! You may need to change the dosage, stop using the drug, or change to a different drug before planning a pregnancy.
- Take a look at the toxic substances that may be in your home, workplace and where you spend leisure time. It takes about three months for sperm to fully develop. Sperm quality may be affected by many factors during that time: heat, chemicals, recreational and prescription drugs, infections, etc. Sperm quality also decreases gradually as men age.
- If you are exposed to potentially harmful substances at work, talk with your employer about alternative arrangements. Be aware that toxic substances, such as chemicals in dust, can travel home with you on your clothing, hair and skin. This may not be safe for your partner and future baby.
- Stop drinking alcohol and smoking before planning a pregnancy. Heavy alcohol use may affect sperm shape and function. Heavy drinking can also affect your ability to be a supportive father and partner. Second-hand smoke can impact the fetus, so consider stopping smoking before the baby is conceived. If you have concerns, contact your health care provider or local addiction services.
- Ensure your immunizations are up to date. Get immunized for chicken pox and rubella (German measles) if you have not had those infections.
- Get screened for sexually transmitted infections. These can affect the health of the baby.
- Find out about your own health and your family's health history. High blood pressure, arthritis, depression, cancer, mumps, diabetes, and Hepatitis B can affect your chances of having a healthy baby. Contact your health care provider or a genetics clinic if there are any family medical conditions you are concerned about such as severe allergies, heart malformations or mental health concerns.
- Make sure you are getting all the nutrients your body needs. A healthy diet builds healthy sperm.
- Take time to be active every day. The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that adults get at least 2.5 hours of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week. Support your partner's physical activity needs.
- To be an involved father, find out about pregnancy, labour, birth and child development issues. Did you know that mothers who have a supportive, involved partner breastfeed more successfully?

Now is a great time to make positive changes in your habits for both you and your partner. This will give you good health before you conceive, and create healthy habits for your future growing family.

Links

- *Is there a baby in your future? Plan for it.* Best Start Resource Centre. www.healthbeforepregnancy.ca
- *How to Build a Healthy Baby.* Best Start Resource Centre. www.beststart.org/resources/preconception/men_health_bro_2012.pdf

# 3	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	Pregnancy	Nutrition during pregnancy	Did you know that you should eat twice as healthy when you are pregnant, not twice as much?

"Eating for two" means eating twice as healthy, not twice as much. Eating well right from the start helps to build a healthy brain for your baby. It also helps you feel your best. During pregnancy, what you eat and drink, and the things that are around you, may have an impact on your unborn baby's brain.

- Make sure you include important baby-building nutrients such as:
  - Folate, from vegetables and fruit (spinach, broccoli, asparagus, sweet potatoes, oranges, berries, cantaloupe, etc.).
  - Vitamin C, from vegetables and fruit (oranges, grapefruit, tomatoes, red peppers, etc.).
  - Iron and protein, from meat and alternatives (lean red meat, beans, lentils, etc.).
  - Calcium, from milk and alternatives (milk, cheese, yogurt, fortified soy beverages, etc.).
  - Vitamin D, from fish and fortified products (milk, fortified soy beverages, margarine, salmon, mackerel, etc.).
  - Omega-3, from fish, nuts, seeds, fats and oils (sardines, salmon, mussels, walnuts, flax seeds, canola and soybean oil, etc.).
  - Carbohydrates and fibre, from whole grain products (whole grain breads, cereals, brown rice, rolled oats, whole wheat pasta, etc.), vegetables, fruits and legumes (dried beans, peas, lentils, etc.).
- Choose foods from all four food groups of Canada's Food Guide.
- Choose less processed foods more often, such as whole grain bread, homemade oatmeal and fruits and vegetables, etc.
- Have two servings of cooked fish each week (one serving = 75 grams or 2.5 oz. cooked, about the size of a deck of cards). Choose fish that are low in mercury such as salmon, rainbow trout, mackerel, light tuna, haddock, sole, etc. If you eat canned tuna, choose "light" tuna over "white" (also known as albacore). The "light" variety is usually lower in mercury.
- Read the labels to limit fatty, sweet and heavily salted foods. Foods with less than 5% of the daily value of salt are considered low in salt.
- Talk to your health care provider about the need for vitamins. Vitamin requirements may vary depending on a number of factors, including your diet and the length of time since your last pregnancy.
- Eat regular meals, including breakfast every day.
- If you are a vegetarian, ensure you get all the nutrients your baby needs, paying special attention to iron and protein.
- Limit the amount of caffeine to less than 300mg/day (about two 8-oz cups of coffee or three 8-oz cups of tea). Caffeine may reduce the absorption of some nutrients, especially iron.
- Be careful if you use herbal teas. Some may harm your baby or may cause early labour. Talk to your health care provider about the safe use of herbal teas or drinks or call Motherisk (1-877-439-2744).
- Drink milk, water or juice instead of soda (pop).
- Protect yourself and your baby from food poisoning by following safe food handling practices. Avoid raw and undercooked fish, meat, poultry and seafood. Avoid foods made with unpasteurized milk and juices.
- For a woman of average weight, a healthy amount of weight to gain while pregnant is 11.5 to 16 kg (25 to 35 pounds). Discuss your personal healthy weight gain with your health care provider.

Pregnancy is a good time to establish healthy family habits. These may include healthy food choices, being active, becoming a non-smoker, having non-alcoholic drinks and balancing work and family time. For some pregnant women, making these changes may be difficult. Help from a dietitian or prenatal nurse may help you manage these changes. Contact your local public health unit for these types of programs.

Links

- *Healthy Eating for a Healthy Baby.* Best Start Resource Centre. beststart.org/resources/nutrition/healthyeating/HealthyEatingForAHealthyBaby_Eng_fnl_212.pdf
- *Prenatal Nutrition.* Health Canada. www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/prenatal/index-eng.php
- *Dish Safer Fish.* Canadian Partnership for Children's Health & Environment. www.dishsaferfish.ca

# 4	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	Pregnancy	Exposures during pregnancy	Did you know that what you are exposed to during pregnancy can affect your unborn baby's brain?

Your baby's brain starts to develop when your baby is conceived. Exposure to certain everyday substances in your home, workplace and outdoor environment can have harmful effects during pregnancy. Exposures include:

- Alcohol. Alcohol can be very damaging to developing brain cells. It can cause fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which includes physical, learning and behavioural problems. Babies need more time than adults to process alcohol. The younger the baby, the more immature their system, and the greater difficulty in clearing the alcohol from their body. Choose alcohol-free drinks.
- Tobacco smoke. Cigarette smoke contains thousands of chemicals which can affect the development of the unborn baby. It is best to stop smoking before pregnancy. Stopping or cutting back at any time will make a difference. Ask visitors and other family members to smoke outside. Clearly identify your home and vehicle as smoke-free. Meet with family and friends in smoke-free public places.
- Medications. All prescription drugs should be reviewed with your health care provider or Motherisk. Many common medications are not recommended for use in pregnancy. Discuss these with your health care provider, pharmacist, or Motherisk.
- Recreational drugs. During pregnancy, recreational drugs (marijuana, cocaine, etc.) can affect the baby's growth and development and increase the chance of being born too small. The drugs may also harm the baby's growing brain.
- Air pollution. High levels of outdoor air contaminants may affect fetal development. Reduce strenuous activity during periods of poor air quality. Vacuum, wet mop and dust regularly with a damp cloth. Dry dusting disperses the dust back into the air and should be avoided. Avoid using scented products, such as air fresheners (including plug-ins), laundry detergents and dryer sheets. Reduce your use of products such as paints, glues, permanent markers, nail polish and aerosols.
- Household cleaning. Avoid products with ammonia, bleach, alcohols, and turpentine. Avoid disinfectant cleaners and antibacterial soaps. Do not change the cat litter yourself.
- Lead. Lead can prevent and harm the development of neurons in the brain. Be careful with old painted surfaces that are peeling. Don't sand, scrape or burn off the paint. Avoid hobbies that involve lead such as painting with oil paints, glazing pottery and stained glass making.
- Mercury. Choose fish that are low in mercury such as salmon, rainbow trout, mackerel, light tuna, haddock, sole, etc. Avoid mercury fillings. Do not have mercury fillings removed during pregnancy.
- Paint. Avoid painting, refinishing furniture, or using paint thinner or stripper when pregnant or breastfeeding.
- Personal care products. Reduce use of personal care products, especially perfumes, colognes, scented lotions, powders, antiperspirant and hair care products (e.g., shampoos, sprays, gels, mousses). Look for products without "fragrance" or "parfum" in the list of ingredients.
- Pesticides. Stay away if pesticides are applied. Wash fruit and vegetables well. If using mosquito repellents, choose ones with 10% or less DEET.
- Plastics. Do not use plastic in the microwave. Avoid purchasing products (e.g., mattress covers, shower curtains, inflatable toys, vinyl flooring) that are made of vinyl. Vinyl, also known as PVC, gives off strong fumes when new. Vinyl gradually releases phthalates, a plasticizer linked to hormone disruption.
- Exposures at work. Follow workplace safety guidelines, use proper safety equipment and wash hands before eating. If necessary, to avoid exposures, request a transfer to a safer work station.
- Home renovations. Avoid renovating your home if you are pregnant or have young children. If renovation work must be done, plan to be away for the duration of the work and return only once all dust has been thoroughly cleaned up and all fumes have cleared.

Pregnancy is a good time to be as healthy as possible as a family. Both parents can help create a healthy home environment.

Links

- Canadian Partnership for Children's Health & Environment. www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca
- *Hidden Exposures – Informing pregnant women and families about harmful environmental exposures.* Toronto Public Health. www.toronto.ca/health/hphe/pdf/hidden_exposures.pdf
- Motherisk. 1-877-439-2744. www.motherisk.org

# 5	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	Pregnancy	Managing stress during pregnancy	Did you know that positive feelings during pregnancy can help your unborn baby's brain?

Positive feelings during pregnancy can help your unborn baby's brain. As future parents, work together to reduce stress in your lives. Here are some suggestions:

- Take time to be active every day. This will help you relax and will provide many health benefits. Improving muscle tone, strength and endurance are important for labour, delivery and recovery.
  - If you have been active regularly before pregnancy, you can safely continue physical activity during pregnancy. Inform your doctor or midwife of your physical activity program.
  - If you have not been active before pregnancy, you can safely start by walking daily. Consult with your doctor or midwife before beginning your physical activity program.
  - Drink water before, during, and after your activity to replace body fluids lost through sweating.
  - Avoid activities requiring sudden starts or stops, jumping, or rapid changes in direction.
  - Avoid being active in hot, humid weather, especially during the first trimester, or when you are ill.
  - Check the temperature of a heated pool before swimming. Avoid hot tubs or whirlpools.
  - Avoid exercises requiring you to lie on your back after four months (16 weeks) of pregnancy. Instead, perform the exercises while lying on your side, sitting or standing.
- See if you can reduce your stress. Your reaction to a situation will affect your level of stress. Here are some suggestions:
  - Identify what is causing your stress. Is it something you have control over or not? Is it a problem you need to deal with or should you let someone else deal with it? Will this problem get bigger with time or will it seem trivial later?
  - Manage your workload and let go of certain things. Pregnancy is a time to look at the priorities for you and your baby.
  - Practice meditation, breathing exercises or calming strategies to help relieve stress.
  - Try to do something pleasant for yourself a few times a week (a bath, pleasant thoughts, a nice meal, etc.).
  - Share your thoughts with your partner, family or a good friend to help you keep things in perspective. Healthy communication between parents reduces stress in families.
  - Practice managing your anger and other emotions. Later, it will teach your child to do the same.
  - Try to build a good support network during your pregnancy. You will appreciate it after the birth of your baby.
  - Some situations may be beyond your control and you may need to live with them. Acknowledging this may be helpful.
- While stronger emotions are normal in pregnancy, symptoms of depression or anxiety should be identified. For example, poor sleep, excessive sleep, loss or increase of appetite, feeling sad and difficulty concentrating may be signs of prenatal anxiety and depression. Prenatal depression or anxiety that is not dealt with can continue on into the postpartum period. If you think you are suffering from depression or anxiety for more than two weeks, talk to your health care provider.
- Domestic violence is very stressful. If you are in a difficult relationship, talk to your healthcare provider about it.

Find ways to relax. Set a peaceful tone for your future family life. Give your baby the best possible start.

Links

- *Active Pregnancy.* Physical Activity Resource Centre. parc.ophea.net/sites/parc.ophea.net/files/PARC_ActivePregnancyResourceFinal_14SE09.pdf
- *Relaxation Techniques for Stress Relief.* HelpGuide.org. www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_relief_meditation_yoga_relaxation.htm
- *Assaulted Women's Helpline.* 416-863-0511. 1-866-863-0511.

# 6	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	0-2 months	Your role as a parent	Did you know that your newborn needs your loving care to develop a healthy brain?

Parents are the baby's most important connection to the world in the first few years of life. Right from birth, babies can learn from and connect to others. Here is how you can help:

- Full-term babies are born with basic brain functions. They are able to breathe, sleep, eat and so on. In order to develop more complex skills, the brain needs to be stimulated often, in a repetitive, predictable, back-and-forth kind of way. This fires up the neurons in your baby's brain and causes it to develop.
- Parents need to provide lots of warmth and attention to set up these early brain connections. With every interaction, you are helping to develop your baby's brain. Do lots of little things with your baby:
  - Respond to your baby.
  - Talk and sing to your baby.
  - Touch and play with your baby.
  - Learn to follow your baby's cues.
  - Help your baby see and touch new things.
  - Show your baby a variety of people, animals, plants and things. Talk about what you are showing your baby.
  - Repeat the sounds your baby makes as if you were having a conversation with them.
  - Repeat the same action or game over and over, as long as your baby shows interest.
  - Cuddle your baby, providing the physical connection they need.
- Your baby depends on you! It is important to respond affectionately every time your baby needs you, 24 hours a day. Night time can be particularly frightening for babies! Comforting a crying baby, even when you want them to go to sleep, lets them know they are loved and safe.
- If a baby cries, it is because they need something, even if it is just for you to hold them for a few minutes.

With every little word and gesture, you will strengthen new connections in your baby's growing brain. You will help your baby learn to think and feel secure.

Links

- *Brain – Parents.* Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development. www.child-encyclopedia.com/en-ca/brain-children/key-messages.html
- *I'm a Dad.* Dad Central. www.dadcentral.ca/im_a_dad

# 7	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	3-4 months	Attachment / relationships	Did you know that a baby's secure attachment is important for brain development?

A secure attachment with a parent is important for healthy development. In order to explore the world, babies need to feel secure. They need to know someone will always be there to help.

- How can you help your baby feel secure?
  - Comfort and hold your baby, especially when sick, hurt or upset.
  - Be there when your baby is sad, lonely or frightened.
  - Pick up your baby when they cry or show they want to be picked up.
  - Cuddle your baby when they are upset.
  - Share smiles and show you care when your baby needs comforting.
  - Talk to your baby often in a soothing voice, so they can easily recognize your voice when they are upset.
  - Let your baby know you will be there when needed. It will give your baby the confidence to explore and learn.
  - Be consistent. Babies need to know that they can expect the same thing every time from you.
- You can't spoil babies by picking them up too often! Babies cry to let you know that they need you. Always comfort a baby who is upset. It will help your baby learn that you will be there when needed. The way you relate to your baby influences how your baby will relate to other people in the future.
- A secure attachment will help your baby's brain development. When babies start exploring, they need to know their parents are not far away if they need them. If children do not feel safe, they will be less likely to explore and may not fully develop their social skills and self-esteem. It is important for babies to feel secure to build their future independence.
- Babies can form attachments with several people (father, mother, grandparents, educator). They develop a stronger attachment with at least one person. This person is usually the baby's main caregiver and the one they spend the most time with.

Building attachment with your baby is one of the most important things you can do as a parent.

Links

- *My Child and I – Attachment for Life.* Best Start Resource Centre. beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev/pdf/parent_attachment_eng.pdf
- *The Importance of Attachment.* TVO Parents. tvoparents.tvo.org/video/172267/importance-attachment

# 8	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	5-6 months	Listening to your baby	Did you know that listening to your baby's cues helps your baby's brain to develop?

Every baby is unique. They each react and learn differently. If only babies could talk, it would be so much easier for us to understand what they need!

- Temperament in babies is established very early on. Some babies are peaceful, others are active and some are very aware of everything going on around them. Temperament will affect a baby's reaction to the environment.
- Your response to your baby's reaction will also shape the way your baby learns to interact with the world. Watch for your baby's cues:
  - Watch your baby's posture, hands and eye movement. Is your baby alert or is your baby sleepy? Is your baby moving a lot or very calm?
  - Does your baby get tired quickly or want to stay awake for long periods of time?
  - Does your baby need a strict routine or can your baby adjust to changes easily?
- Get to know your baby's likes and dislikes. Let your baby lead you to the things that will be exciting or soothing.
- When your baby looks at something, it shows interest. Respond to your baby's interests and follow your baby's curiosity. This will help your baby be interested for a longer period of time and more learning can take place. By following your baby's cues, you can learn what your baby likes.
- Some babies are more sensitive to their environment. Some will be upset with certain noises or the feel of certain blankets or toys. Try to make their environment comfortable for them.
- Help your baby grab things. Make sure their environment is safe and that they are not able to reach unsafe objects.
- Let your baby take the lead, and try to add to the experience. For example, if they show interest in a red ball, tell them the words "red", "ball", "soft", etc. Show them how it can be rolled back and forth, how it can bounce, etc. As long as it is a safe object, let them feel it, smell it, put it in their mouth, etc.
- Some babies need more comforting than others. It is important to provide them that comfort, to reduce stress.

In families with more than one child, each child needs special attention and interaction to pursue their interests, at least some of the time.

Links

- *Can You Change Your Child's Temperament?* TVO Parents.
  tvoparents.tvo.org/article/can-you-change-your-childs-temperament-child-psychiatrist-weighs
- *Temperament.* Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development.
  www.child-encyclopedia.com/en-ca/child-temperament/how-important-is-it.html
- *Respond with Sensitivity.* Attachment Parenting International.
  www.attachmentparenting.org/principles/respond.php

# 9	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	7-9 months	Feeding your baby	Did you know that healthy foods and healthy feeding habits help build a healthy brain?

Proper nutrition plays an important role in developing a baby's brain. Here are some general guidelines:

- Breast milk contains all the nutrients your baby needs, as well as important antibodies to fight infection. All your baby needs for the first six months is breastmilk. No other fluids or foods are needed. The only exception is a daily vitamin D supplement. Talk to your health care provider about vitamin D. Continue breastfeeding up to two years and beyond. The longer you breastfeed, the more benefits you and your baby will get.
- When babies are six months old, they are ready to start solid foods. Your baby does not need teeth to start eating solid foods.
- Introduce iron-rich foods first, such as meat, meat alternatives (such as lentils, beans, chickpeas and tofu) and iron-fortified cereal. Iron is an essential nutrient for brain development.
- Encourage your baby to try a variety of different foods from all the food groups at the appropriate time within that first year. These foods can be pureed, minced or mashed. At first, your baby may not accept new foods. By closing their mouths or turning their heads away, babies show that they are full or do not like the food. If your baby does this, stop feeding that food. Try it again another time. It can take 8-10 trials or more for a baby to accept new foods. Keep mealtime pleasant.
- Include foods rich in omega-3 such as salmon and light canned tuna.
- Offer your baby the breast first, and then solid foods. This order changes after nine months.
- Offer homemade foods. Some processed foods (for example canned soups, macaroni and cheese preparations, sauces, etc.) are high in fat, sugar or salt. Read labels and try to avoid or limit these foods.
- Choose foods that are Bisphenol A (BPA) free. This chemical may be harmful to hormones. Most food and drink cans have BPA in their lining. Choose fresh and frozen foods to help limit exposure to BPA.
- Feed your baby at regular times. A predictable routine is important for brain development. When there is a routine, babies know their needs will be met.
- Include your baby as part of the family at mealtime. Use mealtime as an opportunity to interact with your baby. Talk to your baby about the food, its color, shape and texture.
- Let your baby tell you how much they will eat. Don't pressure your baby to eat. When babies are full, they will let you know by turning their head, closing their mouth or pushing the nipple out of their mouth. Follow their lead and stop when they are done.
- Be a good role model when you eat. Your baby will follow your lead. You can inspire them to eat healthy foods.
- As children get older, try to involve them in meal preparation as much as possible, and make it fun! This will encourage a good relationship with homemade, healthy foods and mealtimes.

Links

- *Feeding Your Baby: From Six Months To One Year.* Best Start Resource Centre. beststart.org/resources/nutrition/pdf/feeding_baby_rev2012_LR.pdf
- Eat Right Ontario. ontario.ca/eatright

# 10	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	10-12 months	Safe environments	Did you know that a safe environment will help your baby's brain development?

For healthy development, babies need the safety and freedom to explore. As parents, it's up to us to provide a safe space both indoors and outdoors.

- Actively supervise children. This means that, at all times, you are watching your child. Stay close enough to prevent accidents from happening.
- When supervising children, avoid distractions such as cell phones and television. Many injuries are caused by distractions due to technology.
- Ensure your baby equipment meets current Health Canada consumer product safety standards.
- Babies learn by putting things in their mouth. Get down at their level and remove any small items they may be able to find.
- Childproof potential hazards, like stairs, electrical outlets, sharp corners on furniture and so on.
- Keep all products which could be poisonous locked up and out of reach of children (cleaning products, medication, cosmetics, cigarettes, etc.).
- Ensure all ropes and cords are out of reach of small children (curtain or window blind cords, electrical cords, strings on clothing, etc.).
- Keep small items such as magnetic toys and jewelry away, out of reach of small children. Some costume jewelry and other metal items, such as key chains, may contain dangerous levels of lead. Do not allow your child to put such items in their mouth.
- Phthalates (chemical plasticizers that may disrupt hormones) were banned from children's toys in 2010. If you have older soft plastic toys, such as teethers, vinyl books and bath toys, put them in the garbage.
- Keep lighters, matches and candles out of reach.
- Reduce your use of harmful household products such as pesticides, chemicals, harsh cleaning products, air fresheners, paints, fragranced laundry products, certain plastics such as vinyl, etc. These items may contain harmful or poisonous chemicals. Babies and children are more at risk than adults. Consider using baking soda or vinegar to clean.
- Frequent dusting will reduce your child's exposure to toxic chemicals that settle into regular house dust. It is best to wet-mop, vacuum with a good-quality vacuum cleaner and dust with a damp cloth.
- Make sure the television and electronic equipment are placed securely and anchored properly. Never place these on a dresser because young children could use the drawers like stairs to access the buttons.
- Play outside with your child every day. Take advantage of public play locations such as playgrounds.
- Be especially cautious when you are near swimming pools, lakes and rivers. You should always be within arms' reach.
- Ontario Early Years Centres provide great locations for indoor play. They may also offer outdoor play equipment.

Allow your child the freedom to be active, to run and play in a safe environment.

Links

- *Home Safety*. Safe Kids Canada. www.safekidscanada.ca/Parents/Safety-Information/Home-Safety/Home-Safety.aspx
- *Consumer Product Safety*. Health Canada. www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/index-eng.php
- *Creating Healthy Home Environments for Kids: Top 5 Tips (video)*. Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and Environment. www.healthyenvironmentforkids.ca

# 11	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	12-15 months	Language and numbers	Did you know babies quickly gain an understanding of the world around them through the development of language?

There are times when your baby's brain is ready to develop certain skills. Language skills need to be put in place as early as possible.

- There is a window of opportunity for learning to talk between one and two years of age. Speech continues to develop for many years.
- Talk together often. Use new words to point out objects, people and interesting things. Talk about what you are doing and about the places you are visiting together.
- Repeat key words slowly, separating the syllables of the longer words that may be new: grand-ma, di-no-saur, ti-ger, etc.
- Give your baby the opportunity to respond to what you are saying and respond back to your baby. Your baby will learn that communication is done back and forth. Encourage your baby's reactions and questions with engaging answers.
- Read books to your baby from an early age. Read with enthusiasm in your voice and in your facial expression. Rather than simply reading the story, add to the reading experience. Ask your baby questions about the story or pictures. Encourage your baby to think about words and objects. You will be setting up important connections in your baby's brain that will help with talking and reading skills later on.
- Sing songs and rhymes that have repetitions in them. Do the actions mentioned in the songs. Encourage your baby to be involved in the song. Emphasize the words that rhyme.
- Speak to your baby in the language you are most comfortable with. Babies can learn more than one language if they hear them regularly.
- If you cannot access books in your home language, talk to your baby using photo albums, magazines or books in any language. As you flip through the pictures, describe what you see, or make up a story in your own language.
- Visit your library and choose books that have pictures of things your baby is interested in (animals, trucks, trains, machines, etc.).

Math skills can also be developed well before school starts:

- Games that include stacking, sorting and counting are a good way to start. These games will help your baby learn how to solve problems.
- Talk about the things that are the same and those that are different. These can be in sizes, colors, textures, etc.
- Songs and rhymes with numbers are a fun way to learn as well, such as "Ten little monkeys jumping on the bed". These will help your baby understand numbers and counting, so that math skills will be easier to learn later on.

If you think your baby may have a delay in their development, talk to your health care provider as soon as possible. This could have an impact on future learning because skills build on each other.

Links

- Nipissing District Developmental Screen®. www.ndds.ca/ontario/
- Ontario Government – Preschool Speech and Language. www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/earlychildhood/speechlanguage/index.aspx

# 12	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	16-18 months	Physical activity	Did you know there are guidelines for physical activity for toddlers?

A healthy body helps create a healthy brain!

Physical activity is a very important part of building a healthy body for your baby.

- Babies need to be able to move and use their muscles. They should not be put in car seats for more than an hour at a time. On long car trips, provide breaks for young children so that they can move and stretch.
- Toddlers should get at least three hours of physical activity each day. Some of it should be energetic play that makes their hearts pump faster.
- Give your toddler the opportunity to learn and practice simple large muscle skills such as running, kicking, throwing, catching, climbing, skipping and jumping. Developing these skills early in life will help them play sports later on.
- There are many ways you can be active with your toddler: roll a ball back and forth, dance or move to music, explore the neighborhood, run through the sprinkler, put some cushions or blankets on the floor and tumble, etc.
- It is also important to know when your child is tired or thirsty and to provide a rest and some water.
- Take your toddler to the park, playground, playgroup, or to an Early Years Centre and give them room to move. The more active they are, the better!
- No screen time is best for children under the age of 2. Studies have shown that children under the age of 2 are too young to understand what they are seeing on the screen. Products that are marketed to improve baby's brains can actually work against healthy development. Instead of watching television, children should be interacting with others and developing their brains.
- Be a good role model. Be active with them. Children learn from their parents. It is up to you to set the example.

Links

- *Physical Activity Guidelines for Early Years.* Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. www.csep.ca/CMFiles/Guidelines/CSEP-InfoSheets-early-years-ENG.pdf
- *Physical Literacy.* Canadian Sport for Life. www.canadiansportforlife.ca/parents/physical-literacy
- *Have a Ball Together – Activity Cards.* Best Start Resource Centre. beststart.org/resources/physical_activity/pdf/Englishx8.pdf

# 13	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	19-24 months	Everyday play using all the senses	Did you know that using the five senses when playing with your toddler helps your toddler's brain development?

It is important to take the time to interact with your toddler. Young children learn while playing as you teach them about the world. Follow their lead. They will show you what they are interested in and when they are ready to learn.

- Between birth and age three, your child's brain creates more connections than it needs. Over time, the brain will naturally fine tune these early brain connections. The connections that are used often will become permanent in your child's brain. Those that are not used as often will disappear. This is where experience through the five senses plays an important role in a young child's brain development.
- Children learn through their five senses: seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. Using these brain connections regularly creates patterns in the brain that help a child form thoughts, habits and memories. Parents need to provide a variety of social and learning opportunities so that the connections become permanent.
- Activities that use the senses can include reading to your child, finger-painting, dancing, singing, music, smelling, tasting new foods and touching interesting things.
- Make play part of your everyday routine. Bath time, mealtime, or dressing your child are ideal opportunities for you to enjoy your child and to support brain development.
- You can teach your toddler a little more by using something they are interested in: What color is it? Is this bigger or smaller than that?
- You don't need to buy expensive toys. You can use simple household objects like pots, pans, cardboard boxes and tubes, and plastic containers. Be sure to check for sharp edges or staples before letting your toddler play with these items.
- You don't always need to have structured play with rules and adult interaction. Free, unstructured, supervised play is also important for young children to figure things out for themselves, and to explore their own interests.
- Many children 1 ½ years to 2 years old like pretend games. They like to imitate you. Playing dress-up or a game of house will allow young children use their imagination and will help with healthy brain development.
- Actively supervise the play of young children at all times. Children this age are very mobile and do not understand danger.

Links

- *Play – How Important is it?* Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development. www.child-encyclopedia.com/en-ca/child-play/how-important-is-it.html
- *Activity Centre.* Parents2parents. www.parents2parents.ca/node/9

# 14	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	25-30 months	Routines	Did you know routines are important to help young children develop a healthy brain?

Young children thrive on routines. They function best when they know what to expect and when to expect it. Develop a healthy daily pattern for your child starting from birth.

- Everyday routines like waking up in the morning, getting dressed, having breakfast, going to daycare and returning home, family dinner time, bath time, reading time and bed time, will give your child stability. They will help your child feel secure. When children are calm and relaxed, they are able to focus on learning.
- Find a routine which works for all the members of your family. Make sure individual differences and needs are taken into consideration. For example, a single parent may find it easier to put the youngest child to bed first and then have special one-on-one time with an older child.
- Routines also reduce discipline issues. If a young child knows that bath time is always followed by story time and by a good night kiss, they are less likely to resist and will be more ready to sleep.
- Help make transitions easier for the children. For example, let your child know that you will be leaving the playground once you have climbed together one more time to the top of the tower. Once you have stated that, stick to it! Also, you can add a song to certain tasks such as picking up the toys.
- Family mealtime is an important part of a healthy family routine. It is a time to connect as a family. As you interact and discuss things together, you are teaching your toddler social skills and literacy. It's a chance for your toddler to bond with siblings and the whole family.
- Be ready to change the routine if it is not working. For example, your toddler may be too tired to pick up all the toys before dinner. It may be best to pick up some toys earlier, just before having a snack.
- It is best to minimize the amount of screen time for young children. For 2-4 year olds, a maximum of one hour a day of screen time is advised. This includes watching TV and playing with computer or video games. Too much time in front of the TV can delay brain and language development.
- Sleep is also crucial to a young child's brain development. Make sure your child has a safe, comfortable and quiet place to sleep. Try to keep a regular sleep schedule. Although every child is different, on average, toddlers need 10 to 13 hours of sleep per day.

Links

- *Family Routines.* FRP Canada. www.welcomehere.ca/index.cfm?fuseaction=page.viewpage&pageid=673
- *Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for the Early Years (0-4 years).* Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. www.csep.ca/CMFiles/Guidelines/CSEP-InfoSheets-ENG-Early-Years-FINAL.pdf
- *Healthy Sleep for Your Baby and Child.* Canadian Paediatric Society. www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/healthy_sleep_for_your_baby_and_child

# 15	Age & Stage	Theme	Title
	31-36 months	Helping your child cope	Did you know you can help your child develop self-regulation?

"Self-regulation" is an important skill for your child. Children are ready to learn when they are calm and focused. So it's important to help children learn to adjust their emotions and behaviours, to cope with changing situations in a positive way. Self-regulation is being the boss of your behavior, emotions and attention. It develops when caring adults respond sensitively to a child.

- Parents can help their toddler observe the surroundings, listen, understand consequences, use words and actions to explain their needs, and problem solve. This will teach your toddler to deal with obstacles in life. It will also keep your toddler in the calm and alert state that is so important to learning.
- When you are with your child, minimize distractions such as texting and television. Focus your attention on your child.
- Set limits for your children and explain the limits. This will help them learn to set limits for themselves. Let them express their feelings while helping them understand other people's feelings. For example, if your child takes a toy from another child, tell them that they would not like it if it happened to them. Explain that they should not do it to others if they would not like it themselves. Show them ways to ask for a toy or wait for a toy to be available. Show them another toy they could use while they are waiting. Show them a way where both children can play with the same toy.
- Try to be positive in stressful situations. Learn to identify the things that make you feel stressed. Manage your anger and other emotions. This will teach your child to cope with emotions. Your child will learn from your behaviour. Try to set a good example.
- Be consistent in your expectations. It is best if all caregivers have similar expectations. For example, "It is fun to climb, but you can't climb on the table, whether you are with mommy, daddy or anybody else. You could get hurt if you fall. You could put germs or dog hairs on the table and we would be eating them. Let's go to the playground later where we can climb."
- Give children choices you can live with. Explain the consequences and be ready to help them work these out. Tell them that it is OK to make mistakes and to change their mind. That is how they can learn from experience.
- Use positive discipline techniques. Learn to understand your child's temperament, needs and skills. Set clear expectations that are appropriate for the age of your child. Use distractions, provide choices and help your child solve problems.
- Avoid yelling, threatening, hitting and spanking. These are known to harm brain development. They will also raise your child's stress level and prevent learning.
- It is important to understand your child's development level. Very young children are not trying to be difficult. They have not reached a level where they can understand why you don't want them to do something.
- Never physically hurt your child. Hitting, pinching or spanking your child will also teach your child that it's okay to do the same to others. Never hurt your child physically or emotionally under any circumstances. If you need to, put the child in a safe place. Give yourself time to calm down in private. You can also ask for help from family or friends.

Links

- *Building Resilience in Young Children.* Best Start Resource Centre. beststart.org/resources/hlthy_chld_dev/pdf/BSRC_Resilience_English_fnl.pdf
- *Resiliency Resources for Parents.* Reaching IN… Reaching OUT. www.reachinginreachingout.com/resources-parents-selfcontrol.htm
- *Self-Regulation.* Dr. Stuart Shanker. www.self-regulation.ca