Healthy Minds: Nurturing Your Child's Development from **0 to 2 Months**

What do we really know about how a young child develops? What can parents do to best support their child's healthy development and growing brain? Some of the answers are in this series of *Healthy Minds* handouts. Each handout is based on findings from a report* from the National Academy of Sciences that examined the research on child and brain development to establish what is known about the early years. The information we offer is age-specific, summarizes key findings from the report and suggests how you might be able to use these key findings to nurture your own child's healthy development.

These handouts are brought to you by ZERO TO THREE, the nation's leading resource on the first 3 years of life, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, dedicated to the health of all children.



Key findings
from the report include:

- Your relationship with your child is the foundation of his or her healthy development.
- Your child's development depends on both the traits he or she was born with (nature), and what he or she experiences (nurture).
- All areas of development (social/emotional/intellectual/language/motor) are linked. Each depends on, and influences, the others.
- What children experience, including how their parents respond to them, shapes their development as they adapt to the world.

How it looks in everyday family life:

When 2-month-old Benjamin cries and cries each evening and kicks his arms and legs wildly, his parents try everything they can think of to comfort him. They rock, walk and swaddle him, massage his tummy in case he has gas and sing lullabies, all to calm him down. Sometimes it takes 20 minutes; sometimes it takes 2 hours.

Benjamin's crying, and his parents' response to it, shows how all areas of his development are linked, and how his parents help to encourage his development. Benjamin cries because he has come to expect that his parents will respond. When mom and dad don't give up trying to comfort Benjamin no matter how frustrating it can be, they are nurturing his **social and emotional development** because it makes him feel important and he learns to trust that his parents will care for him. This gives him the confidence to trust others, which will help him form healthy relationships as he grows. In addition, being soothed by his parents in these early months will help him learn to soothe himself as he gets older, a very important skill throughout life. Using his voice and body to communicate is part of Benjamin's early **language and motor development**. When his parents answer his cries, he learns that his efforts at communicating are successful, which encourages him to communicate more, first through gestures and sounds, and later through words.

Relationships are the foundation of a child's healthy development.

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Charting Your Child's Healthy Development: **0 to 2 months**

The following chart describes many of the things your baby is learning between 0 and 2 months and what you can do to support your child in all areas of his development. As you read, remember that children develop at their own pace and in their own way. Understanding who your child is, what his strengths are and where he needs more support, is essential for promoting his healthy development. If you have questions regarding your child's development, ask your pediatrician

What's going on:	What you can do:	Questions to ask yourself:
One of the most important tasks of the first 2 months is to help newborns feel comfortable in their new world. They are learning to regulate their eating and sleeping patterns and their emotions, which help them feel content, safe and secure.	• Observe carefully. This will help you figure out what your baby's cries are telling you. • Soothe your baby. When you respond to your baby's cries and meet his needs, you let him know he is loved. You can't spoil a baby. In fact, by responding lovingly to his needs, you are helping him learn skills now that allow him eventually to soothe himself. You are also promoting a strong bond and healthy brain development.	• What soothes your baby? How do you know? • What most distresses him?
Newborns use their gestures (body movements), sounds and facial expressions to communicate their feelings and needs from day 1. They use different cries to let you know they are hungry, tired or bored. They ask for a break by looking away, arching their backs, frowning or crying. They socialize with you by watching your face and exchanging looks.	• Figure out what your baby is trying to tell you. Responding makes him feel important and tells him he is a good communicator. This builds a positive sense of self and a desire to communicate more. • Talk and sing to your baby. Tell him about everything that's going on around him. Pay attention to the sights and sounds he likes. Find toys and everyday objects with different colors and textures and see which he likes best.	• How does your baby communicate with you? • What kinds of interactions does he like best? How do you know? • How does he let you know when he has had enough?
Even as newborns, babies can play in many ways. They can connect sounds with their sources, and love when you talk and sing to them. Play helps babies learn about the world around them. It is also an important way they connect with you, helping them to develop a strong attachment and promoting healthy social development.	• Offer your baby lots of different objects for him to look at, touch and even grip in his palms. He can focus best on things that are 8 to 12 inches away. • Play "tracking" games by moving yourself and interesting objects back and forth. First he will use his eyes to follow. Eventually he will move his head from side to side. This helps strengthen his neck muscles as well as exercise his visual abilities.	• What experiences does your baby seem to like best? (For example, talking with him; looking at toys or other objects; hearing the cat "meow.") • What kind of toys grab your baby's attention? How does he let you know what he's interested in? • What kind of play do you enjoy most with your baby?

**The report, From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development, was a 2½-year effort by a group of 17 leading professionals with backgrounds in neuroscience, psychology, child development, economics, education, pediatrics, psychiatry and public policy. They reviewed what was known about the nature of early child development and the influence of early experiences on children's health and well-being. The study was sponsored by a number of federal agencies and private foundations.*

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Enhancing the quality of life of infants and young children

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