

Baby

Body builders



Reach High!

As early as the first month of your baby's life, you can help her begin to reach for things. Lay her on her back and hang colorful objects like soft rattles or small stuffed animals about 10 to 12 inches above her chest. She will stare at them and try to focus. Let her lay there as long as she seems interested. When she turns her head away from the objects, she is becoming over-stimulated and you should take them away. Soon you will see that she seems to "accidentally" hit the objects with her hands. In time, her movements will become more controlled and she will be able to hit them more often and on purpose.

Your baby is learning how to control her muscles to move her body. She needs a lot of time to stare at objects that are within her reach and practice batting at them.



Let's Move

Before your baby can move around by himself, you can help him use his arm and leg muscles. Lay your baby on his back so that his head is supported.

Let him grab your fingers and help him stretch his arms up and then put them back down, up and down. Reach his arms out from his side and then put them back to his side again. If he is enjoying this play, you can slowly move his hands around each other in circles, and softly clap his fists together. Do the same with his legs: while holding his feet, bend his knees gently, and then stretch his legs out. Move his legs like he is riding a pretend bicycle. Help him make kicking movements too. Sing a little song while you are stretching and moving his arms and legs or count each movement to make it fun. Make sure your moves are gentle, and keep your baby's head supported while you are playing with him. Look for your baby's clues that he is getting tired or the activity is too much for him.

You are helping your baby feel what it is like to use the muscles in his body.



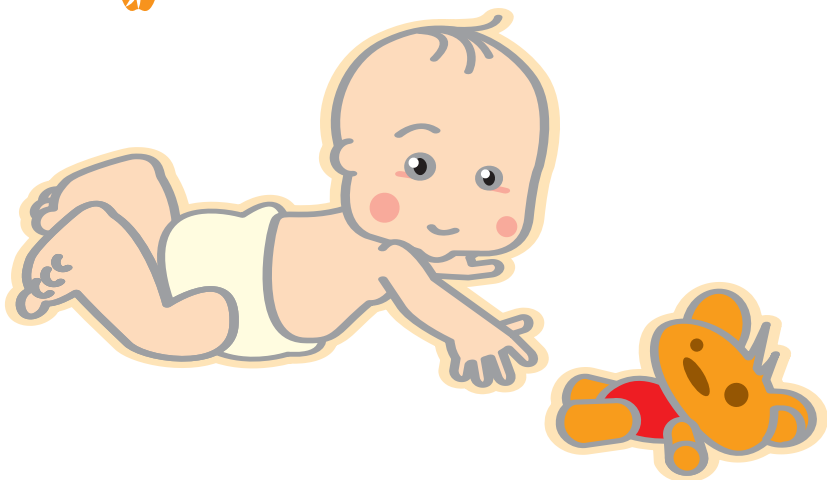
Circle Move

This is an activity to do with your baby before she can crawl, but when her neck is strong enough to lift her head. Place your baby on her tummy on a soft blanket on the floor. Put a toy on the blanket where she will have to reach for it. Once your baby reaches for and grabs the toy, praise her.

Great job! You got the toy!

Then take the toy and move it out of your baby's reach again, so she has to move her body in a circle to reach it. Each time your baby reaches the toy, encourage her, and keep moving the toy in a circle around the blanket.

Stretching and reaching for a toy helps your baby learn to use her muscles to move around.



Cereal Fun

Once your baby is able to sit by himself and is starting to eat small pieces of soft, solid foods, buckle him into his high chair and place a handful of “o-shaped” cereal on his tray. At first he may grab the cereal pieces with his fist and shove them into his mouth. With practice, he will begin using his thumb and pointer finger to carefully pick up each piece of cereal separately and place it gently into his mouth. He is learning to better control his fingers which, as he grows, will help him to fasten his clothes and scribble with a crayon!

Your baby will need a lot of practice before he is able to control his finger and thumb and pick up items like small, soft pieces of food .

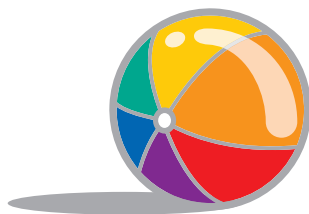


Bouncing Baby

Lie on your back on the floor, and pull your knees up to your chest. Place your baby on top of your bent legs and hold his hands. Holding him firmly, gently bounce your baby up and down, and then side to side. As you bounce, sing a song, or make up a rhyme to go with the motion, like:

**Up and down, up and down,
we are flying into town!**

Your baby is learning balance as he moves up and down and side to side with your legs.



Let's Play Ball

Once your baby is able to sit well by herself, she is ready to play simple ball games. Sit on the ground facing her and slowly roll a soft ball (or even a rolled-up pair of socks). At first, she will not know to roll it back to you, so gently take the ball back and roll it again. Say:

Roll the ball to me!

and put your hands out. You can show her how to do this by leaning forward and rolling the ball back to yourself. She will soon understand the game and her skills will continue to grow. Eventually, she will be playing soccer or baseball with you in the park!

Timing is everything when it comes to playing ball. Your baby is learning how to time her movements to make things happen.



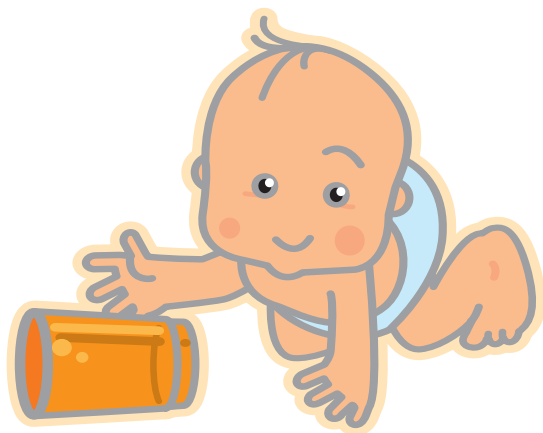


Roll That Cup

When your baby is learning to crawl or can crawl, place her on the floor on her tummy, and, where she can reach it, place a toy or object that can roll.

A small ball, or an empty plastic water bottle or empty plastic drinking cup will work great. As she reaches for the object, it will roll out of her reach and she can crawl after it, reaching and batting and grabbing for it.

Your baby is learning to use her muscles to move, to reach, bat and grab.



Walk-About

After your baby begins to scoot and crawl, it is time to think about the furniture in your home. Are there low, sturdy tables or chairs that he can use to pull himself to a standing position? Are low furniture pieces close enough together that he can move from one to another without letting go? Have you removed any items that are not safe, that he can pull over or that have sharp corners, or that you don't want him to touch? Your baby will want to challenge himself by moving around in a standing position. Consider rearranging a few pieces of furniture. Place some colorful toys on top of the low furniture so that he will be encouraged to stand up to get them. Once he is standing, place another item a couple of feet away so that he will have to walk (using the furniture for support).

Your baby is using his home to build his body and learn new skills. His natural development will guarantee that he will constantly push himself to try new things. You will need to make sure that his environment is safe and fits his level of growth!



Stacking Blocks

Toward the end of her first year, your baby will be able to start learning about stacking blocks. Find some soft blocks for her to use, or try working with plastic food storage containers or empty facial tissue boxes (these may be too big for your baby to handle) or instant pudding boxes. Work with your baby, showing her how to stack blocks, and helping her to stack them herself. She may be mostly interested in knocking down the blocks, but keep showing her how to put one on top of the other. Praise her when she stacks two items, and then three, and then four. What a good builder she is!

Stacking blocks (and knocking them down!) builds your child's eye-hand coordination and teaches her about balance and how objects fall.



I'm Gonna Get You!

It is amazing how fast babies can go when they master the skill of crawling! Your baby will enjoy following you around the house. In this activity, you will get a chance to play at your baby's level. Get onto the floor with your baby and try crawling. Follow him and say:

I'm gonna get you!

Crawl as fast as you can, and when you catch up to him, give him a big hug and kiss and say:

I got you!

Repeat this game until he understands the idea. He will start to laugh and will try to crawl faster. Next, switch places and let him chase you. Crawl a few feet away and look back and say:

Are you gonna get me?

Laugh and continue a few more feet. Look back and crawl behind a piece of furniture where he can't see you. When he comes to find you, laugh and let him "catch" you. He will soon learn the fun of the chase!

This activity is great exercise for both of you!



Notes