

BabySense – One to Three Months!

by Cristy Balcels, RN, MSN

When we first brought Diego home from the hospital, all I think we did for the first couple of weeks is sleep – both of us! But now that he's a month old, I can't believe how awake he is sometimes! I never expected my newborn to be taking in the world so much already. Sometimes when he's awake during the day for an hour or more, I wonder, what should I be doing with him? I mean, he's not old enough for toys...or is he? He seems so alert sometimes, like first thing in the morning. I would really like to have some fun with him when he's awake.

Even at one month old, brain research has demonstrated that your baby is ready to learn, and YOU are the best teacher. Adjusting to parenthood is an experience like no other, and it can only enrich your experiences with your baby if you are armed with some knowledge about what to do with your little one along the way! Even at one month, your newborn is showing you during her alert periods that she is absorbing and learning – just watch how her eyes become wide when they fix on something interesting. Sometimes a baby's pupils will actually dilate when they see something “interesting” at this age, and by six weeks most babies learn to turn their head from side to side to see the world.

For the first three months, black and white is best. If offered a bold black and white design (stripes, for example) versus an elaborate colorful picture, very young infants will gaze at the black and white patterns. Try this at home:

- Make your own black and white flashcards using a bold, wide-tipped black marker and white 5x7 index cards. Draw one large design on each card, such as a bullseye, checkerboard, smiley face, horizontal stripes, vertical stripes, diagonal stripes, and large dots. You can use these flashcards wherever baby looks – for example, tape them to a piece of paper and tape it to the backseat of the car facing the car seat. Hang a couple above or on the wall at the changing table. Put one in the top of the canopy of the stroller, or on the side of the swing. Tape them to the walls of the crib, or poke holes through the middle and hang them facing down like a mobile. You will be amazed how this simple project can be so entertaining for baby!

Now that Hannah is two months old, we've gotten to know one another pretty well. We've pretty much gotten the hang of feeding, although when she cries I sometimes still can't figure out why. She still cries a lot in the evening every day, like she's worn out or her tummy hurts, but I'm not sure. But the other day, I started making shadow puppets on the wall with my fingers at her changing table, and she was totally entertained for 20 minutes! She even smiled!

Your baby is forming the most important relationship of his life right now – with you! He is learning to trust that someone will meet his needs, take care of him, comfort him, and teach him. Teaching your baby now through play just paves the road for later, when “learning” is much more of a focus (such as in the preschool years). Take every opportunity to introduce your baby to new parts of the world. Some fresh air every day is a wonderful experience for her – imagine what wind and warm sun would feel like on brand new skin! Linger during bathtime, and do more than just wash the essentials. Open up baby's fists and let him feel the warm water. Use baby shampoo to make a bubble bath, and let her watch you blow soap bubbles in the air or pile them on her tummy. Sing out loud, “This is the way we wash our arm...” to the tune of “The Mulberry Bush”.

Baby's hearing is also well developed by now. Take advantage of this with baby's bicycling legs by making some foot rattles:

- Foot rattles sell in stores for around \$5-7, but you can easily make them yourself, and they are perfect for the active kicker! She'll quickly learn that when she cycles her legs, they jingle! Take a normal pair of baby socks, and make them more interesting by either drawing black stripes with a marker, or using very thin pieces of black electrical tape. Sew very securely one large jingle bell (you can get these at the fabric/craft store) to the toe of each sock, just like sewing on a button. Put them on your baby's feet, and show her how they jingle when you move her legs. Then watch her go! (Note: Always stay with your baby when using these rattles to avoid any choking hazard. Foot rattles should not be used past 3-4 months when your baby could put them in his mouth.)

What an amazing month! Jacob's third month has definitely been full of change. Now he smiles at me on purpose, and makes lots of noises! He squeals and squeaks with delight when we play with him, and he learned to reach for his toys. When he sees something interesting he looks, then reaches, then brings it to his mouth. Now he wants to play most of the day!

The greatest accomplishment of your three-month old is learning to use his hands. He has learned, "Those hands are attached to me – I can make them move and grab!" The realization is obvious, as suddenly your baby wants to touch everything. She's probably still doing a lot of batting and swiping, and not always getting what she wants the first time, but let her try. Let her reach for the toy (or spoon, or remote control, or whatever is handy!), and cheer her on as she gains more control and is able to bring it to her mouth to "taste" it. A baby's mouth is as important as his fingers in learning about shapes, sizes and textures. Some researchers even believe a baby can tell the difference between a round versus square object just by mouthing it. "Floor gyms" and activity mats are a good investment for this age, or you can make a more simple version yourself:

- Make a ribbon scarf for lots of fun batting and chewing. Take a long scarf, and securely sew several six inch pieces of wide, sturdy ribbon along one edge so they hang down. Use bold colors and patterns, such as red, black and white. Hang this across the crib, or tie to each end of the swing or infant seat, or just dangle it above baby for play. You can make a "travel size" for the diaper bag using a washcloth if your baby thinks it's fun!

The first three months are filled with suspense as your baby changes almost before your eyes every day. Capture the moments with pictures or in a journal, and cherish every moment you share together. A baby is only a baby for such a short time!