

Baby Sense™ for New Moms & Dads

by Cristy Balcels, RN, MSN

People used to think of newborn babies like helpless creatures who could do little other than sleep and eat. Today, child development experts agree on what some observant parents have known all along- there's a little person in there! Sure enough, your baby is learning, absorbing, and trying to communicate with you beginning with his first wail when he was welcomed into the world. Not only is your baby ready to learn, but he actually may thrive from your extra efforts. Here are some ideas of things to do during the first few months:

- *Relax.* There are no good words which can really describe the overwhelming miracle of bringing home your newborn baby. True, your baby is completely dependent on you for food and safety, but do try to remain calm. Remind yourself to just try to be full of love and patience... and relax! Don't try to follow anyone else's schedule or advice other than your baby's. For instance, "training" your baby to sleep through the night at this age causes many parents great distress. Remember your baby is a sensitive small person who needs you, and that some babies just have a natural tendency to sleep more (or less!) than others. When you relax and push out those panicky new parent thoughts ("He ate less that time... what if he never eats again?!), you can focus on just being loving, patient and attentive. Enjoy each other.
- *Read.* Read for you and for baby. We've all heard "knowledge is power", and for new parents, we are fortunate to have a wealth of resources available at the local Barnes' and Noble or via the Internet. Books on breastfeeding, child development, newborn care, etc...can be great – if you remember to listen to your baby first then the "experts". Also, start reading aloud to your baby. Some of my favorite memories with my two-month-old son are of lying on the floor together, both our heads sharing the same pillow, and looking up at the pictures as I read aloud. Black, white and red pictures with high contrast will be the most interesting to your little one for the first 6 months, but read anything you enjoy, including stories you remember from your childhood. Reading to your baby from the beginning gives a tremendous boost to language development.
- *Play.* Research shows that moms and babies who engage in interactive play throughout the first year have a better bond and more robust development. Hold your little one in front of a mirror (putting her feet on the mirror may help get her attention) and talk and smile. Bundle up and go for a walk outside or check the mail together. The change of environment often soothes a cranky baby. Sing, play with his feet, and talk about everything at bathtime, diaper changes, and when getting dressed. How do you know if your baby likes it? When you're playing "this little piggy" and he pushes his feet toward you or smile right into your eyes, he's asking for more!

Most of all, just focus on giving your new baby lots of love and follow your instincts. After all, now you're in the members-only Mommy and Daddy club!