

Raising a Happy Baby



Tickle, Tickle, Little Toes: How Touch Will Help Your Baby Grow

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Sometimes it is hard *not* to want to cuddle your baby all the time! But did you know that the rocking, stroking, cuddling, and all the hands-on care is also contributing in very powerful ways to your baby's development?

According to [The New York Times](#), it was back in World War II when it was noted that orphaned babies failed to thrive when not given enough physical contact and subsequent research began to look more in-depth into the neurochemical effects of skin-to-skin contact on babies.

In some of the most dramatic new findings, premature infants who were massaged for 15 minutes three times a day gained weight 47 percent faster than others who were left alone in their incubators - the usual practice in the past. The massaged infants also showed signs that the nervous system was maturing more rapidly: they became more active than the other babies and more responsive to such things as a face or a rattle. (Goleman, 1988)

This focus on the value of touch has continued to today, where Cong, et al. (2009), notes that premature infants undergoing potentially painful medical procedures did markedly better when under "kangaroo care" (skin to skin contact) with the mother, rather than having the procedure done while in an incubator. This seems to indicate that the touch of a loved one may help mitigate pain.

Further, Dr. Gerstein (2012) notes that touch is how infants feel safe, even before they can understand spoken words and that it promotes healthy physical and emotional development, as well as teaches trust.

So we know that touch is a powerful way to bond with your baby and to help them grow. Here are some things you might want to consider incorporating to make the most of those precious cuddly days:

- **Babywearing** – whether in a sling or carrier, advocates of “wearing” your baby note how it helps increase bonding and offers consistent touch.
- **Infant Massage** – a wonderful way to use touch as a way to soothe, relax, and comfort your infant. Check local hospitals and other organizations for classes in your area.
- **Sensory Exploration** – Expose your baby to many different textures. Let them do the touching. Your hair and face, cloth that is soft or fuzzy, perhaps other smooth and scratchy textures. Use whatever natural items you can find around the house and encourage exploration.
- **Signing Time Classes** – Signing Time Academy classes offer a great time to bond with your baby. You can sit them on your lap (facing your or the Instructor) and offer gentle hand-over-hand modeling of the signs you are learning.

SOURCES

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