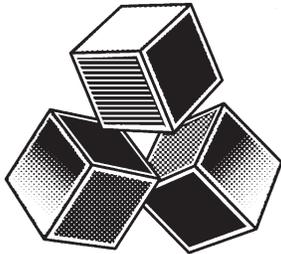


4 Months Old



# PARENT EXPRESS

## A Guide for You and Your Baby

### Dear Parent:

*Your baby is beginning to explore his world.*

Have you noticed how your baby responds to you with smiles and thinks that everything is a game? Or how he sometimes seems shy or afraid? From now on, you'll find that your baby uses all his senses—sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch—to learn about the world around him.

You can help him explore his world by playing, holding, talking, singing, and spending time with him. What could be more exciting and rewarding than watching your baby develop a personality all his own?

### In This Issue

- ▶ What It's Like to Be 4 Months Old
- ▶ Fathers as Caregivers
- ▶ Feeding Your Baby
- ▶ A Question about Spoiling
- ▶ Games Babies Play
- ▶ Coping with Daily Stress
- ▶ Toy Safety

### What It's Like to Be 4 Months Old

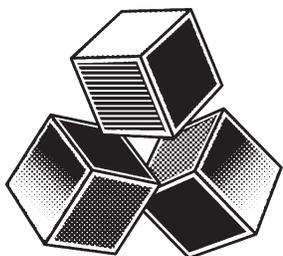
#### How I Grow

- ▶ I turn my head in all directions.
- ▶ I lift my head forward when I'm on my back and grab my feet with my hands.
- ▶ I sit up for about 15 minutes with my head and back straight if you support my body.
- ▶ I prefer sitting instead of lying down—it's more interesting.

- ▶ I roll from my back to my side, but sometimes I get my hand caught under my stomach.
- ▶ I stretch my legs out straight when I'm on my back or my stomach.
- ▶ I put things in my mouth.
- ▶ I splash and kick in the bath with my hands and feet.

#### How I Talk

- ▶ I babble and imitate sounds such as coughing and I click my tongue for long periods of time.
- ▶ I coo, grin, or squeal with joy when you talk to me.



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## How I Respond

- ▶ I love to see myself in the mirror.
- ▶ I'm fascinated by my hands.
- ▶ I like some people and am shy with others or scared of them.
- ▶ I may have one favorite toy or blanket.

## How I Understand

- ▶ I can remember something for at least two weeks if I am in the same place where I first saw or heard it.
- ▶ I know if something is near or far.
- ▶ I'm aware of depth and distance.

## How I Feel

- ▶ I get excited when I'm having fun—everything is a game to me.
- ▶ I cry and get mad when you stop paying attention to me or take a toy away.

## Fathers as Caregivers

Today, with more mothers working, more fathers are becoming involved in the care of their babies. In some one-parent families, the father is the main caregiver for his child.

There's no question that fathers can form close relationships with their babies. Fathers can love, guide, teach, and nurture their babies. So how much should you, the father, be a part of your baby's life? As much as you can!

## Feeding Your Baby

After four to six months, your baby will be ready to eat solid foods in addition to breast milk or iron-fortified formula.

## When to Feed

Increasing numbers of doctors recommend that babies not be given solid food until they are at least 4 months of age, and they prefer that parents wait until 5 or 6 months to begin feeding cereals and other solid foods. The reason: before 4 months, babies do not have full mouth and tongue control and usually push solids out with their tongues. Therefore, semi-liquid, mushy foods should not be given to your baby before she can sit up with support or has some head and neck control. Also, feeding solids too early in life may lead to overeating, obesity, and increased risk for food allergies. Check with your healthcare provider before beginning solid foods.

## What to Feed

After 4 to 6 months, your baby will be ready for other foods in addition to breast milk or iron-fortified formula. Usually an iron-fortified infant cereal is first. Choose a single-ingredient infant cereal such as rice, oatmeal, or barley.

## How to Feed

Put a teaspoon of infant cereal in a dish (not in the bottle) and mix it with iron-fortified formula or breast milk. Don't add sugar, salt, butter, or any seasonings.

For the first few weeks, offer the cereal once or twice a day after breast or bottle feeding. Use a baby-size spoon to feed your baby. Give her just a small taste at first. If she seems interested, give her a few more tastes with the spoon. If she doesn't like it or pushes the spoon away, wait a few days and then try again. Don't force your baby to eat. She will accept solids when she is ready.

Try only one new food at a time. For example, if you start with a couple of teaspoons of infant rice cereal, continue for a week before introducing infant oatmeal or infant barley.

The first feedings probably will be messy. Your baby has been only sucking up to now, but she soon will learn how to swallow solids. With a little patience, you can help your baby learn to eat and like different foods. Try to make mealtime pleasant for both of you.

Sometimes a new food can cause diarrhea, a skin rash, or even a runny nose. If you think your baby has an allergy problem, check with your healthcare provider.

## A Question about Spoiling

**Whenever my baby cries, I pick him up. My friend says I'm spoiling him. Is she right?**

Most child specialists agree that you are not spoiling your baby when you react promptly to his crying. A baby's needs are usually immediate. If he is hungry, he wants to be fed. If he is uncomfortable or scared, he wants to be held.

You don't have to worry about spoiling him. Answering his needs makes him feel safe, loved, and worthwhile.

Not answering his needs and ignoring him may teach him that the world is not to be trusted. The basic need for trust is the foundation for self-discipline. It's necessary for his growth into a well-adjusted, caring human being.

Your baby needs a lot of love from you—the most important person in the world to him.

## Games Babies Play

### I Can Move to Keep Things in Sight: Eyes and Body Game

#### Purpose

This game teaches your baby to use his body and to lift his head and part of his upper body when watching a moving object.

#### How to Play

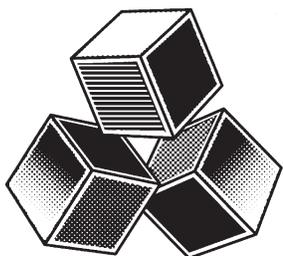
- ▶ Put your baby on his stomach and sit facing him.
- ▶ Use a ring of keys or a box or can filled with buttons and rocks.
- ▶ Dangle the noise-making object in front of your baby's face and say, "Look at the keys."
- ▶ Raise the object slowly in the air to encourage him to lift his head and push up with his hands.
- ▶ Say something like "Follow the keys" or "Keep your eyes on the keys."
- ▶ Watch your baby and see if he can lift his chest off the floor.

### Another Eyes and Body Game

- ▶ Move objects slowly behind your baby's head. See if he will move around to find the object.

## Coping with Daily Stress

Does your stomach feel tense? Do you often get headaches? Do your muscles ache? Do you sometimes feel like hitting someone or crying for no reason? These are some of the signs of stress—and you can do something about it.



Everyone goes through stress or strain at one time or another. Stress builds up from daily worries, crises, or life changes such as becoming a new parent or getting divorced or changing jobs. For some people, it can build up to the point at which they can no longer control their emotions or they strike out at the world around them.

It's easy to ignore the first signs of stress. But if you listen to your body and your feelings, you can learn to read the warning signals and take action to reduce tension. Here are some stress-reducing suggestions and exercises.

### Suggestions

- ▶ Put your baby down for a nap and forget what you "should" be doing. Take some time to relax. Do whatever makes you feel fresh again.
- ▶ Don't keep worry and anger bottled up. Talk about these feelings with someone close to you.
- ▶ Set reasonable goals for yourself. Then decide what first steps you want to take toward those goals.
- ▶ Pick out the most important things and don't worry about the others. Trying to do everything plus taking care of your baby will wear you out.
- ▶ Get regular exercise. Try walking 30 minutes a day with your baby in a frontpack, sling, or stroller. Exercise helps to relieve stress, and your baby will enjoy being outdoors.

### Exercises

- ▶ Raise your shoulders up to your ears. Hold while counting to four, then drop your shoulders back to their normal position. Rotate your shoulders back, down, and around—first one way, then the other. Repeat several times.

- ▶ Lie on the floor with your feet up on a chair. Place a cool washcloth on your face and think of the most peaceful scene you can imagine. Stay there for at least five minutes.

### Places to Get Help

- ▶ Call Parents Anonymous if you are worried that your feelings are getting out of hand. It is a national organization for parents who are concerned about child abuse. You will not have to give your name. Phone (909) 621-6184 between 8:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. Pacific Standard Time to get advice, help, someone to talk with, or to find a Parents Anonymous group in your area. E-mail: [parentsanonymous@parentsanonymous.org](mailto:parentsanonymous@parentsanonymous.org). Web: <http://www.parentsanonymous.org>.
- ▶ Call your local comprehensive care center for information on counseling and parent education groups.
- ▶ Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline, (800) 799-SAFE or TTY: (800) 787-3224. This nationwide organization of women's shelters and domestic violence programs will give you help or tell you where to get help.
- ▶ Call your local spouse abuse center. There are 15 such centers scattered across Kentucky. Check your phone directory or call the Lexington shelter at (800) 544-2022 for information and referrals. Web: [http://www.kyma.org/uploads/file/Public\\_Resources/Domestic\\_Violence/Patient\\_Education\\_Resources.pdf](http://www.kyma.org/uploads/file/Public_Resources/Domestic_Violence/Patient_Education_Resources.pdf)
- ▶ Call Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky at (800) CHILDREN (1-800-244-3736). This organization is concerned primarily with prevention of abuse. You will be listened to and referred.

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- ▶ Call your local child abuse council. Check your phone directory for its number.
- ▶ Call the Kentucky Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies at (877) 316-3552 or (800) 956-8950 to find the regional child-care resource and referral agency nearest you. There are 15 agencies across Kentucky that can help you learn childcare options, identify high quality childcare, and locate appropriate childcare. Web: <http://www.kentuckypartnership.org/ccrr/>.

## Toy Safety

Make sure all toys or objects given to your baby are safe. When considering toys for your baby, keep in mind these recommendations from the National Safety Council. Toys should be:

- ▶ Washable
- ▶ Large enough so that they don't fit into your baby's mouth, ear, or nose
- ▶ Light enough so they won't cause injury if your baby drops them on himself
- ▶ Made of durable material that will not produce sharp edges if broken

Here are some suggestions for safety in toys:

- ▶ Avoid toys with spikes or wires in them.
- ▶ Make sure toys have no parts that can catch fingers.
- ▶ Check to see that toys are labeled nontoxic.
- ▶ Remove any loose metal squeakers from squeak toys.
- ▶ Avoid hanging pacifiers or toys from long strings above your baby's bed. They can come loose and get tangled around your baby's neck. Don't hang them around his neck, either.

- ▶ Check toys for loose or broken parts that could be swallowed or leave sharp edges.
- ▶ Check labels for age recommendations.
- ▶ Don't give plastic bags to your baby as playthings.

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*Parent Express guides you through parenting of children through age 36 months. For other publications in the 27-part series, contact your county Cooperative Extension Service office.*