

# Developmental activities to do with your baby whilst they are awake during their hospital stay

Children's Therapy Department

Information for Patients

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## Introduction

The aim of this leaflet is to give practical advice and support to help your child's development during their stay in hospital. Using toys, sounds, lights and pictures will help to create a stimulating environment for them to gain new skills.



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## Encouraging play time to support your baby's development

Children with congenital heart defects are likely to spend a lot of time in hospital either waiting for, or recovering from, surgery. Play is important in helping your baby's social, emotional and motor development. It helps them to achieve age appropriate skills and provides them with the foundations for the next stages of learning.

Babies may only manage a few minutes of play at a time after their surgery, so try to engage with them when they are settled and awake. Start with a couple of minutes and gradually build this up each day, as over-stimulating your baby may cause them to fuss and unsettle. Watch your baby's cues for when they are ready to play. (Ask to speak with the occupational therapist if you need help to identify approach and avoidance behaviours.)

### Examples of signs of being ready to interact, explore and coping:

Hands together, feet together, grasping, hand to face/mouth, smooth movement, relaxed face, looks to sound/voice, sucking, comfortable position and alert

### Examples of signs of being stressed and they may need some help or time out:

Twitching, sneezing, hiccupping, arching, grimacing, finger splaying, looking away, crying, high guard hands

## Tummy time

Tummy time is helpful for your baby's head, neck, and shoulder development which will later allow them to sit, crawl, roll and stand. Sudden infant death syndrome guidelines recommended that babies should sleep on their back at home, so never leave your baby unattended on their tummy and if they begin to tire place them back into their crib on their back.

If your baby has had open heart surgery their sternum will need time to heal. We advise that your baby should not lie on their tummy for the first 6 weeks after their operation. However, there are alternative positions which can support with strengthening their muscles in the same way.

- Place your baby on their tummy onto your chest and over your shoulder (you can still wind baby in this position). You can sing songs or talk to your child to encourage them to lift their head.
- 6 to 8 weeks after surgery, you can put your baby onto their tummy on the floor, a mat or on their bed with a rolled up blanket underneath their arms and chest. You can use brightly coloured toys, mirrored toys and rattles to encourage your baby to lift their head and put weight through their arms and shoulders.

## Moving and carrying your baby after surgery

The staff will advise you on handling and bathing your baby as extra care must be taken to protect the sternum wound whilst it heals.

- Do not lift your child underneath the arms or pull them up from their arms for the first 6 weeks after surgery.
- When lifting your baby, scoop them by supporting behind their shoulders and underneath their legs to avoid stress on the wound.
- Support your child's belly, chest and back (trunk) when they are sitting or standing.
- It is important to change your baby's position regularly to avoid their skin becoming sore.
- Having your baby out for cuddles is really important as this can improve muscle tone and circulation, lowers anxiety and stress and creates a healthy sense of personal boundaries. Check with the nurse if you can do this, and if there are any positions that should be avoided.



## Communicating with your baby

Communication with your baby begins at birth; they take in lots of information just by watching and listening to you. Your baby will communicate through sounds, facial expressions and body gestures.

- If your child is unwell, they might be given a sedative to help limit their pain and distress. Your baby will still recognise familiar voices, so talking to them may help them to feel at ease.
- Speak before you touch, so baby will hear your voice and they will know you are close.
- Responding to your baby's cues is essential as it tells them their communications are effective and important. This will help them to continue with developing these skills.
- Regular face to face time will aid you with bonding. Initially, they will find your face and voice the most interesting.

## Visual development

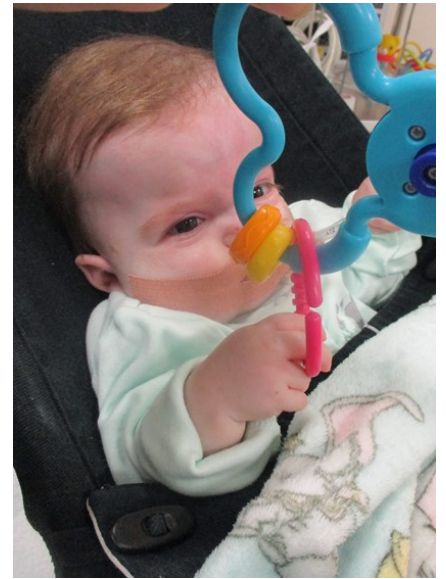
- Encourage your baby to look at you. Try to get them to follow your face. Move slowly from one side to the other.
- You can use high contrast/ coloured objects to capture their attention, for example mirrors, glitter tubes, light torches.
- Because of the high contrast, babies will focus on black and white images first rather than colours. Try using objects or books with black and white images to encourage them to focus their vision.

## Finding their hands

Positioning your baby into side-lying will help them with bringing their hands together in their middle (midline) which will later help with their hand-eye co-ordination. This position is important for babies as it stops them spending lots of time on their backs, which can later affect the shape of their head.

You can put a rolled up towel or blanket behind your baby to help them to maintain this position.

Start to introduce small rattles or toys once your baby is able to focus on them, this will encourage them to start reaching and grasping. This will start to help with them using their hands and hand-eye coordination begins.



## Contact details

If you need any further advice or information please ask to speak to the East Midlands Congenital Heart Centre Children's Occupational Therapy or Physiotherapy Team.

0116 258 3389/5714 (Mon to Fri 8:30am to 4:30pm)

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