

Toys and Play: Birth to 12 Months



Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center provides this handout to give you some guidelines about choosing toys and play activities for children from birth to twelve months.

Activities/Abilities

From 0-6 months:

- Follows objects with eyes.
- Localizes sounds; turns to see.
- Gains control of hands; finds feet.
- Explores with hands, feet and mouth.
- Aware of others, self.
- Does one thing at a time.
- Begins to smile at faces, voices and mirror.
- Listens to voices; may imitate sounds; begins to coo, babble and laugh.

From about 6-9 months:

- Begins to sit alone for brief periods; roll over both ways.
- Babbles, imitates sounds; repeats "mama," "dada."
- Develops thumb and finger grasp.
- Transfers objects from one hand to the other.
- Enjoys bath play, kicking and splashing.
- With objects: bangs, pokes, twists, squeezes, drops, shakes, bites, pulls.

From about 9-12 months:

- Begins to: sit alone; creep and crawl; pull to stand; hold onto furniture while walking; walk alone.
- With objects: drops, shakes, throws, opens/shuts, pushes/pulls, empties/fills.
- Interest in: appearing/disappearing; emptying cupboards, drawers, containers; letting go and dropping objects; exploration; cause and effect.
- Remembers people, objects, toy actions.
- May fear strangers, change.

- Watches/imitates others.
- Sensitive to praise, disapproval.
- Responds to "no."
- Knows own name, may point to named objects, obeys simple commands.
- Enjoys simple games; peek-a-boo, bye-bye.

In General

Toys for this age are for looking, listening, sucking or fingering.

Infants 0-2 months enjoy seeing and hearing things.

Infants 2-6 months show growing interest in touching, holding, batting, turning, shaking, kicking, mouthing and tasting objects.

Infants like to see:

- Bright primary colors
- Bright contrasts
- Simple designs
- Clear lines and features
- Human faces (especially eyes)
- Bull's-eye patterns

Infants enjoy watching hanging objects or "mobiles."

Toys for watching should be hung or held about 8-14 inches from the infant's eyes at first and angled toward eyes; then kept out of reach.

Toys for watching are better if they move and make noise (but movement should be slow and noise not too loud or sudden).

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In General, continued

Infants 6-9 months explore toys longer; like to bang, twist, squeeze, shake and bite.

Infants 9-12 months show interest in moving objects and like many objects to explore; like to stack, put in and take out, pour out, fit one object into another, open/close, press levers, turn things (not unscrewing yet), push balls and cars.

Infants in this age range often like operating simple devices, containers, container/contained relationship, objects that appear and disappear.

Active

Sports Equipment

From about 6-8 weeks:

- Clutch balls
- Texture balls
- Soft squeeze balls

From about 6 months:

- Transparent balls
- Chime balls
- Flutter balls
- Action balls

Push and Pull Toys

From about 9 months:

- Push toys without rods (simple cars, animals on wheels or rollers).
- Pull toys on a short string.

Ride-on Toys—not suited to age group.

Outdoor/Gym Equipment

- Infant swings (with adult supervision).

From about 9 months:

- Soft, low climbing platform for crawlers.
- Infant activity gyms.

Manipulative

Construction Toys

From about 4 months:

- Soft blocks

From about 7 months:

- Rubber or dense foam blocks
- Small wooden blocks

Puzzles—not suited to age group.

Pattern-Making Toys—not suited to age group.

Manipulative Toys

From about 2 months:

- Simple rattles
- Teethers
- Light, sturdy cloth toys (with no plastic pieces or buttons)
- Lightweight squeeze toys
- Toys held or hung above or to side of infant for batting and grasping



From about 4 months:

- Plastic disks or keys on ring
- Connecting plastic rings
- Toys on suction cups
- Crib gyms
- Squeeze toys
- Rattles with moving parts
- Koosh balls

From about 9 months:

- Large, plastic pop beads
- Drop objects on a string (string no longer than 12 inches)
- Squeeze-squeak toys
- Roly-poly toys
- Activity boxes and cubes

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Manipulative Toys, continued

From about 9 months:

- Pop-up boxes (easy to operate).
- Containers with objects to empty and fill.
- Mirror toys (unbreakable) which can be held.
- Loses interest in crib gyms and toys held or hung above when can sit up and move about (crib gyms can create safety hazards when child can get to hands and knees and should be moved out of reach).

Dressing, Lacing, Stringing Toys—not suited to age group.

Sand and Water Play Toys

From about 7 months:

- Activity boxes for the bath
- Simple floating toys

Make Believe

Dolls

- Soft baby dolls, soft-bodied dolls, rag dolls (no loose parts; only molded hair).
- Rattle dolls.

Stuffed Toys

- Small plush animals (no plastic parts or buttons).
- Music box animals (operated and monitored for safety by an adult).
- Grab-on soft toys.
- Rattle animals.

From about 9 months

- Big soft toys for hugging and roughhousing

Puppets

- Soft hand puppets

From 0-6 months: Held and moved by adults.

From about 9 months: Baby may handle.

Children play from the moment they're born. They need to play, not just because it's fun—of course, it is!—but because play is how they learn about themselves and their world. It's how they develop and practice the physical, intellectual and social skills they'll need in life.

The choices parents make about toys are key, because playthings both reflect and teach values. They teach skills and behaviors. They help form young minds and bodies.

But choosing toys need not be a stressful task. Play is mostly fun, and selecting playthings can be too, once you know some basics about play and safety.

Safety

Toys should meet safety regulations for age:

- Non-toxic materials.
- No sharp points or edges.
- Safe for mouthing.
- Non-breakable; no glass or brittle plastic.
- No small parts to be lodged in throat, ears, nose.
- No parts to entrap fingers, toes, hands.
- No electrical parts.
- Use the right safety equipment when needed (helmets, life vests, knee pads, etc.).

Nothing can take the place of careful supervision.

For More Information

- **Your health care provider**
- **Children's Resource Line:**
(206) 987-2500 or 1-866-987-2500
toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho
- www.seattlechildrens.org

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider.

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