

Six must-haves for the early months

1

Playmat

Young babies spend much of their time sleeping on their backs, so supervised daily tummy time is recommended to avoid flat head syndrome. A playmat or gym is ideal for lying your baby on their front for short periods, as well as on their back to stretch and kick.

2

Rockers and bouncers

Suitable from birth, a bouncing or rocking chair will keep your baby safe and secure (and your hands free). Most babies find the gentle rocking motion comforting, and some chairs come with toy bars, adjustable seat positions, and even vibration or musical effects.

3

Soft toys

Your baby may start showing an interest in toys from around 6 weeks, so a soft toy kept near them in their cot or Moses basket (ideally at the foot for safety reasons) will soon become a favourite, and may even help comfort them to sleep. Go for a small toy or comforter that's easy for your baby to hold.

4

Contrasts and colours

Your baby's sense of sight develops gradually over the first 6 to 8 months, and to begin with they can't focus more than about 8-10 inches, so toys with black and white or high-contrast patterns are best. As your baby gets a little older, they'll start to show more of an interest in bold primary colours.

5

Rattles

Rattles help stimulate your baby's sense of hearing, and encourage hand-to-eye co-ordination. Until your newborn gets to grips with their own movements, you can try waving a rattle in front of them to keep them entertained. Then, as your baby gets older, they'll enjoy learning to grasp and play with it themselves.

6

Books

It's never too early to start reading to your baby. A book at bedtime can offer valuable bonding time, and they'll be soothed by the sound of your voice. There are also plenty of colourful books designed for babies, with textured, mirrored pages to help stimulate their senses, and some come with useful clips for the pushchair.



As your baby gets older

- You'll be one of your baby's favourite things to play with. You can encourage hand-to-eye co-ordination by playing clap hands, and language development by talking to your baby whenever you make eye contact. Meanwhile, playing peekaboo with a muslin cloth will be a source of endless amusement.
- Look for toys with flashing lights, sounds and movement to help develop your baby's senses. Toys that make a noise when they press a button will help them start to learn about cause and effect.
- Babies love to see things built up and knocked down, so invest in a set of building blocks, stacking cups or rings. Shape sorters are also ideal for developing hand-to-eye co-ordination and fine motor skills, and teaching problem-solving.
- As your baby starts to crawl, you can encourage them by rolling a favourite ball just out of reach. Rockers, ride-ons and bouncers that hang in the doorway can help develop little leg muscles, while a walker or push-along is ideal for support as your baby learns to walk.