

## When does a baby start to learn?

Dr Melodie de Jager

New moms and dads often think of learning as something that starts when a child goes to school, but learning starts a few weeks after conception when baby responds to touch, a few weeks later to smells and tastes and a few months later to sound. Baby's eyes mostly develop after birth and that is why shining a torch on your tummy is not a good idea.

**What is remarkable, is that your baby's ability to read, write and reason six and a half years later when he enters Grade 1 is substantially developed before he is only 14 months old!**

### HOW?

During the nine months in utero and the first 14 months in life, baby is acquiring all the tools and equipment he will need to survive, grow and develop. Unfortunately many people confuse growth with development and believe that if they feed their baby and keep him beautifully clean, healthy and safe, that all is well. They are right, their baby will grow and the clinic sister and pediatrician will be very happy, but baby needs more than food and a clean nappy to develop. Baby needs stimulation to develop his brain.

### Stimulation is less about a full tummy and more about the brain.

A full tummy helps baby to grow, but brain stimulation helps baby to develop and to become clever. New moms and dads seldom realise that their new baby needs to learn a lot in the first 1000 days and that he needs mom and dad to give him the opportunity and stimulation to learn those things, because stimulation builds a clever brain and a fool-proof recipe for life.

**Brain stimulation occurs when you gradually and gently wake up of all baby's senses and muscles in a specific sequence. No matter how clever the brain, the brain needs wide-awake senses and strong muscles to prompt the brain into action.**



### No parent would ever dream of having a child with problems.

When you start thinking of your baby it is with a clear image of a healthy and happy baby who babbles and coos to the delight of everybody that comes in contact with him. The more engaging and endearing baby is, the more people like to interact with him – make eye contact with him, touch him, play with him, talk to him and teach him all kinds of new 'tricks'. Such a lovely baby would easily develop a positive sense of self, spurred on by all the laughs, shining eyes and hand-clapping he receives every time he does something cute and clever.

Every time you make eye contact with your baby, touch him, feed him or change his nappy, play with him, encourage tummy time and talk with your new born baby, Adriano Milani Comparetti says you are having a developmental date with your baby.



A developmental date is a moment of focused contact between mom, dad and baby when you instinctively, lovingly and gently engage as many of his senses, muscles and parts of his brain as possible, but with enough resting moments in between to prevent overstimulation.

### What can you do to boost brain development while pregnant?

Brain development starts when mom looks after herself during pregnancy.

- 3 months before falling pregnant – go for health check (mom & dad); reduce alcohol and smoking (drugs); check that mom is immune to rubella (measles)
- Check your weight – too little weight gain during pregnancy is associated with under developed placenta and malnourished baby. Too much weight gain is associated with high blood pressure and infections which puts baby's wellbeing at risk
- Folic acid is important for nerve development
- Healthy food shapes a healthy brain
- Be careful of eating cracked eggs or leftover meat that was not kept in airtight containers, it may be infected with Salmonella. Avoid blue and soft cheeses
- Exercise is important to supply baby with good quality oxygen which act as brain fuel. Fit moms have fit babies. Passive moms have babies with low muscle tone
- Avoid overheating from overly strenuous exercise, hot baths and saunas
- Chronic stress is toxic. Your baby feels what you feel. Choose a lifestyle and circumstances that promotes feelings of happiness, peace and laughter, baby will echo those feelings
- Avoid pollutants, strong chemical smells, smoke, constant noise, unnecessary scans and negative people.

Free radicals attack cells on a daily basis and can damage DNA. It is a natural by-product of your metabolism, processed food, smoking, alcohol, recreational drugs and environmental pollution, but this can be balanced by exercise and a nutritious diet full of antioxidants –  
Zita West

The fatigue and nausea that many women suffer in early pregnancy are a means of protecting the embryo and young fetus. These symptoms peak during the baby's most vulnerable phase, when all of the organs are first forming. Fatigue tends to keep a woman from risky physical activities; while pregnancy induced nausea (morning sickness) tends to keep her diet bland, helping her to avoid natural toxins present in spoiled or exotic foods -  
Lise Eliot

### Bibliography

M de Jager, M. 2011. Brain development MILESTONES & learning. Johannesburg: Mind Moves Institute.