

Baby's First Year

By Terry Goetz, Director of Education and Outreach, Creative Dance Center

The first year of life is a year of discovery and incredible growth. By the time your baby is reaching toddlerhood, the experiences of the past year will have produced amazing changes in you and your baby. Current brain research shows that a combination of “nature and nurture” or genes and environment affect the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development of babies. We can't do much about the genes we pass on to our babies, but we can provide an environment is one that promotes healthy and optimal brain and kinesthetic development.

This simply means creating a rich, multi-sensory world for your infant to live in. Think voice and visuals, taste, touch and smell, movement and motor skills. Put baby on his or her tummy on a non-carpeted surface allowing baby the space and time to work through the fundamental movement patterns that not only develop motor skills, balance, and postural alignment, but also help to hardwire their central nervous system. Sing and talk, cuddle and massage, dance and play, interact during feedings, and encourage tummy time by getting down on **your** tummy face to face with your baby. You are your baby's favorite toy!

Time spent in “containers” such as car seats, exersaucers, bouncy seats, etc., should be used as necessity and safety dictates. Pediatricians and physical therapists are seeing an increase in plagiocephaly (flattening of the head) and developmental delays in babies due to the amount of time spent in the passive, supine (on the back) position.

Developmental progression can be disrupted if baby spends too much time in positions and places that don't allow for freedom of movement. Remember, back to sleep and tummy to play!

As parents we want to provide the best foundation we can for our children. Isn't it wonderful and reassuring to know we can do that at no great expense, without fancy gadgets and toys? It seems so fundamental and basic, and it is! Follow your baby's cues and allow them to progress at their own rate. Find time throughout the day to incorporate playful and fun tummy time. Dance to a wide variety of music holding your baby. Babies love the vestibular stimulation they receive when they bounce, swing, fly, and sway while dancing with a loving caregiver. Express your own creativity through rhymes, movement, and sensory games in ways that feel good to you and your baby. The healthy, respectful, and nurturing relationship you develop with your baby in the first year of life will stay with you both forever. Enjoy the dance.

