



PART OF THE
"BETTER BRAINS FOR BABIES" COLLABORATION

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Building Baby's Brain

The University of Georgia College of Family and Consumer Sciences

The Basics

What happens to a baby makes a big difference in his later life. Babies who do not get enough love and attention may not grow up to be happy adults. What happens to a baby in the first few years can also change his brain.

WIRING THE BRAIN

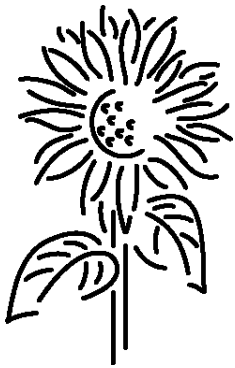
A baby has more than 100 billion brain cells when he is born. These brain cells are already connected to other brain cells at birth. These connections are the brain's "wiring."

Your baby's brain already knows how to do some things right away, like control breathing. The brain is wired to keep his heart beating and do other things he needs to stay alive.

A lot of brain cells don't connect until later. In the first few years, the baby's brain cells make connections all over the brain. These connections shape how he thinks, feels, and acts.



WIRING THE BRAIN (CONTINUED)



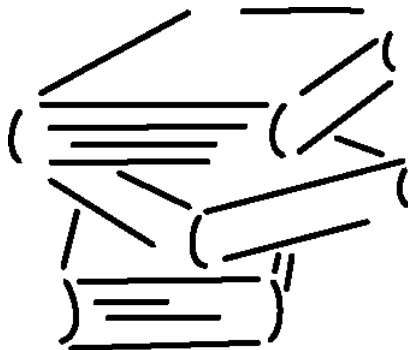
Before your baby is 3, his brain makes more connections than he needs. It is a little like growing a garden. You plant lots of seeds, and then pull out some plants so the others have room to grow. Your baby's brain does the same kind of thing. The brain knows which connections are used a lot. It weeds out the ones that are not used much. That way, the most important ones have more room to grow.

EXPERIENCE IS IMPORTANT

Everything that happens to a baby helps build connections in the brain. What he sees, hears, smells, tastes, and feels all matter.

No two brains are alike! Each baby's brain is wired differently because each baby's life is different. A baby who can hear people talk makes many connections related to talking and listening. A deaf child's brain doesn't make those connections because he can't hear.

How you care for your baby helps decide how the brain wires itself. Parents who talk to their babies help them make language connections. Parents who take care of their baby when he cries make emotional connections. These connections help him get along with others when he gets older.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Parents and caregivers can help a baby's brain make connections. Here are some ways you can help:

Make sure your baby is born healthy. Eating healthy foods when you are pregnant helps your baby's brain grow. Don't drink alcohol or take drugs.

Have checkups with your doctor when you are pregnant. These things will help your baby be born healthy.

Make sure your baby is safe. Make your home safe for your baby. Take out things that could hurt him. Take care of him when he cries.

Give him attention. A baby feels stress when no one takes care of him. Stress can slow down brain growth.

Talk to your baby. When he makes a sound, repeat it. Smile at him. Talk about the things you're doing with him. Playing with your baby face-to-face builds brain connections for language. It also helps him learn how to get along with people.

Read to your baby. Hearing you read helps the brain learn language. It also gives you a chance to cuddle with your baby. Reading also helps your baby learn to love books.

Choose good child care. Babies need loving care and new things to do. Make sure the place is clean. Choose a person who will play with your baby one-on-one.

Ask questions. Lots of people can help you be a good parent. Ask your doctor questions when you take your baby for a checkup. Ask your librarian for good books. Contact your county Extension Service office to learn more about parenting. You don't have to know everything!