

## WHAT CAN YOU DO? (CONTINUED)

As you play with your baby, see how he takes in everything around him. Since the early windows of learning are so important, give your baby the best home you can. Make it safe. Protect him from scary things. Talk a lot with your baby, even before he can talk. Sing songs and dance together. Show him that he can trust you. Remember, the first years last forever!



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# Building Baby's Brain

The University of Georgia College of Family and Consumer Sciences

## Prime Times for Learning

Our bodies have different needs at different times. There is nothing like a cold glass of water when you are really thirsty. Or getting a full night's sleep when you are tired to the bone.

We also know some things are learned easier at certain ages. Kids are expert at roller-blading after a few minutes, but grandfathers take longer. Some adults never learn to set the VCR!

### BRAIN BUILDING EXERCISE

Different parts of the brain control how we act and feel. Your brain controls how you throw a ball and play the piano. It also keeps you calm under stress and figures out a math problem. You can help the brain grow by "exercising" it.



Think about your muscles. Your brain, like your muscles, gets stronger when you exercise. If you run, your leg muscles get stronger. You exercise your brain when you think. If you only watch TV and never talk, the part of your brain in charge of talking may shrink! Listening to music is good for your brain. Playing music and dancing is even better for your brain.

## PRIME TIMES FOR BRAIN GROWTH



We learn some things most easily during certain times, called “windows of opportunity.” These are times when the brain is most ready to learn something new. It is like a window in the brain opens for a while, then closes again. When the window is open, it is easy to learn. When it is closed, you can still learn, but it is harder. Most of the brain windows open and close during the first few years of life.

These windows are “prime times” for learning. Each part of your brain grows larger and more active depending on what you see, hear, taste, feel, and smell. Here are some important times when your baby’s brain is growing:

### **Seeing: Birth to 4 years.**

During this time, babies need to see shapes and colors. They need to see things that are close and far away, and things that move. The brain has to learn how to see! That is why if your baby has anything wrong with his eyes, it should be fixed early.

### **Talking and reading: Birth to 10 years.**

Babies are born ready to learn any language. They understand and babble the language they hear the most. The more talking, singing, and reading a baby hears, the more words he will understand and use. Babies also learn how sentences are put together so they make sense. This is the best time for babies to learn a second language.

### **Feelings: Birth to 18 months.**

The part of the brain that handles feelings learns very early. Feelings like happiness, hopefulness, and sadness begin here. How you treat your baby shapes this growth. The feeling part of the brain keeps growing through the teenage years. What happens early is most important for the brain’s feelings.

### **Music and math skills: 1 year to 5 years.**

The part of the brain that hears music is the same part that does math. Listening to rich, complex music is good for a baby’s brain. This kind of music helps a baby learn the skills needed to do math. The earlier a child studies a musical instrument (like the piano), the more of his brain is used for it. So, if you want your child to be good in math, give him music lessons too!

### **Movement skills: birth to 2 years.**

Every mother knows that babies can kick even before birth! During the first months after birth, your baby’s brain learns to control his muscles. These muscles help him hold his head up, roll over and crawl. Active games and gentle exercise help his brain learn these skills. Soon he will learn to use his small muscles to do things like pick up small toys and feed himself. Be patient and encourage him to keep trying!

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

First, and most important, do not feel bad if you did not know these facts when your child was younger. All of us keep learning all through life. Just think of all the musicians, athletes, and scientists. Their parents did not know these things. But their brains work great!

