



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

Ten Facts

Researchers have learned many new things about how our brains grow and change. People used to think that a baby's brain was just like an adult's brain, only smaller.

Now we know that babies' brains are very different from adult brains. A baby's brain is not done growing when she is born. Babies are born with billions of brain cells. Most of the brain cells connect with each other during the first three years of life. These connections help control what we think and do.



HOW THE BRAIN WORKS

Here are 10 things we know...

1. What happens before birth affects learning.

When you are pregnant, you need to eat healthy foods and get enough B-vitamins. Drinking, taking drugs, and not eating the right foods can hurt your baby's brain.

2. The brain changes after birth.

Most of the brain's cells are there before birth. But brain cells make most of their connections with other cells during the first 3 years of your baby's life. The brain keeps changing and making connections until about age 10.

3. What happens in a baby's life affects her brain.

The brain makes connections based on what the baby does. If your baby doesn't do certain things, some parts of the brain won't connect. If your baby could not see for the first year, her brain might never learn to see clearly. That is because the brain cells that are needed to see never connected.

4. Bigger heads don't mean smarter babies.

A bigger head doesn't mean a bigger brain. And just having a big brain doesn't make you smarter. Dolphins have bigger brains than people. Humans are smarter than dolphins because our brains work more quickly. We have exactly the connections we need.



5. Babies' brains are more active than adults' brains. A 3-year-old's brain is twice as active as an adult's. By about age 3, the brain's cells are all connected. Over the next few years, some of the connections change. The connections that the child uses the most get stronger. The connections that she does not use much will die.

6. The brain grows in spurts.

There are "prime times" when the brain learns things best. Babies and young children learn languages more easily than adults because their brains are ready to learn language.



7. We can learn throughout our lives.

There are prime times when learning is easier. But people can still learn new things when they get older. Learning might be harder after the prime times are over, but it can still happen. Adults may learn a new language more slowly than their children. But adults can still learn how to speak other languages.

8. Learning starts before your child goes to school.

The brain connections needed for learning start forming even before a baby is born. Good early care can help your child be ready to learn. Warm, loving care helps babies form a strong bond with their caregiver. Children with this strong bond are more ready to learn. Bad things that happen, like abuse, can slow down brain development. This makes learning harder.

9. Enrichment is good for all children.

All babies and children need to try new things. This helps their brain cells make new connections. Remember that children learn by doing. Let your baby explore the world. Give her new things to do. Help her when she tries something new. Teach her to be creative.

10. Children don't need expensive toys to get smarter.

What children need most are loving care and new things to do. But doing things with your baby doesn't have to cost money. Talk and sing to your baby. Go on walks and show her what you see. Visit the library and pick out a new book. Showing your baby new things helps her brain grow.

Don't overdo it. Some parents worry too much about their baby's brain. They buy expensive toys and videos to help her. Just buying toys won't make your baby smarter. Too many new things all at once won't help her brain. She needs time to practice what she's learned.