



LET'S GO HOME.

The OTs and PTs in the NCCC have enjoyed getting to know you and your baby. We want to help you feel prepared to care for your baby's developmental needs at home. We've included some play activity ideas and developmental tips in this packet for you to try with your little one!

ADJUSTED/CORRECTED AGE VS. CHRONOLOGICAL AGE – WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE AGAIN?

Since your baby was born prematurely, developmental milestones are based on their DUE DATE, not birth date. This means you will “adjust” for your baby’s prematurity when thinking about infant milestones (sitting up, crawling, eating solid foods, etc). You will continue to “adjust” for your baby’s prematurity until the 2nd birthday.

Sensory System Development

Your baby may still show signs of overstimulation or stress, and this is a normal part of preterm infant development. Continue to look for “cues” and respond in ways to help your baby stay in a calm state. At this age, your baby may respond well to:

- Being held close to your chest in a “tucked” position
- Deep pressure into the back, arms, and legs
- Swaddling, especially of the arms
- Gentle rocking forward/back or up/down
- Patting on the bottom
- Soft shushing, singing, or humming
- Sucking on the pacifier



MOTOR SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

“Flexion” or being curled up/tucked, continues to be an important part of your baby’s motor development. As your baby grows, it will be important that both the muscles of flexion (curling) and muscles of extension (straightening) develop equal strength. Your preemie will need more help using their flexion muscles. It is for this reason that we continue to encourage you to swaddle your baby for sleep until they begin rolling over (usually around 4 months adjusted age).

Your baby will also benefit from the **variety** of positions you will give them at home! You can stimulate your baby’s sensory, motor, and brain development by giving them opportunities to play in these different positions.

The following activities are recommended to help your baby find and use the right balance of muscles in a variety of positions:

Back: While your baby is reclined in your lap or on a flat surface in front of you, try these:

- Patty Cake
- “So big” and “Hug a baby”
- Leg Bicycles
- Toe touches and kisses



Tummy time:

It is important for your baby to practice tummy time while awake and throughout the day.

- On your chest – this position is best early on when your infant is just getting used to holding up the head. Be sure to use your hands to support your baby's arm position.
- On the floor – spread out a blanket and plenty of toys and let your baby play on their tummy. Your baby will play happily for short periods, and over time, endurance will improve!



Side:

Your baby can more easily find muscles of “flexion” on their side, so this is a good way to practice good movement and posture.

- Roll your baby from back to side by holding onto the legs and gently turning their body back and forth
- Position your baby on the side and put interesting toys in their reach to explore
- Lay on your side across from your baby and guide their hands to find your cheeks, nose, and mouth

**Upright sitting:**

Being upright challenges the muscles in the neck and back that preemies need extra help developing.

- Early on, your little one will need lots of help to hold the head in the middle. You can do this with your hands high on the shoulders, or by practicing sitting up while your baby is swaddled. It is best to practice when your baby has something interesting to focus on, so try positioning your baby on a higher surface (like a table) in front of you.

Standing:

Right now, we do not recommend that your infant spends any time in the standing position. This is because early standing encourages infants to overuse their muscles of “extension” or straightening. Since flexion is so important for preemies to develop, practicing early standing could delay your baby’s motor milestones. Check with your OT or PT at their follow-up clinic appointment to see when your baby is ready to try standing.

IN THE MEANTIME, AVOID:

- Letting your baby stand and bounce in your lap repeatedly
- Allowing your baby to use doorway jumpers, exersaucers, and baby walkers

Your baby's head and neck development

It is very common for preemies to develop a preference to turn the head to the right or left side while in the hospital. If your baby has a preferred side, there are ways you can help:

- Hold your baby in both the left and right arms
- Feed your baby in varied positions so that they face different directions (bottle or breast)
- When you put your baby down in the crib, lay them flat on their back with their head facing alternating crib sides
- Change your baby's diaper from different sides
- Scatter toys in a semicircle around your baby so that they can look in many directions to find something interesting



Baby Equipment

There are many available infant seating and positioning devices for purchase. There are some important things to consider when you choose these for your preterm baby:

1. Your baby should always be able to move their body freely so that they can explore and build muscle strength. They should not be too restricted in how they can move or see.
2. Remember that your baby benefits from variety of positions! Spending too much time in any device will not allow your baby to develop balanced motor skills.



Your therapists recommend avoiding:

1. Allowing your baby to spend long periods of time in the car seat. The car seat should be used for travel only, and not for extended shopping trips, walks, or sleeping
2. Exersaucers, door “jumpers,” and baby walkers that allow your baby to stand (using extension muscles)



**Therapists recommend avoiding
walkers and jumpers**

We are so happy to have met you and your baby! We are proud of your baby's accomplishments and we look forward to watching them grow!

Thank you,

The NCCC OTs and PTs



TO CONTACT THE THERAPY TEAM,
email us anytime at ncccotpt@unc.edu,
for more information visit tempo.web.unc.edu