

Reading Books to Babies

Although an infant won't understand everything you're doing or why, reading aloud is an important form of stimulation. It invites your baby to look, point, touch and answer questions — all of which promote social development and thinking skills. And your baby improves language skills by imitating sounds, recognizing pictures and learning words.

Reading aloud:

- teaches a baby about communication
- introduces concepts such as numbers, letters, colors and shapes in a fun way
- builds listening, memory and vocabulary skills
- gives babies information about the world around them

Kids whose parents frequently talk/read to them know more words by age 2 than children who have not been read to. And kids who are read to during their early years are more likely to learn to read at the right time.

Different ages, different stages

Young babies may not know what the pictures in a book mean, but they can focus on them, especially faces, bright colors and contrasting patterns. Between 4 and 6 months old, they may begin to show more interest in books. Expect her to grab and hold books, and mouth, chew, and drop them as well. Choose sturdy vinyl or cloth books with bright colors and repetitive or rhyming text.

Between 6 and 12 months old, your child is beginning to understand that pictures represent objects, and most likely will develop preferences for certain pictures, pages or even entire stories. She will respond while you read, grabbing for the book and making sounds, and by 12 months old will turn pages (with some help from you), pat or start to point to objects on a page, and repeat your sounds.

When and how to read

Try to set aside time to read every day — perhaps before naptime and bedtime. In addition to the pleasure that cuddling your baby before bed gives both of you, you'll also be making life easier by establishing a routine. This will help to calm your baby and set expectations about when it's time to sleep.

It's also good to read at other points in the day. Choose times when she is dry, fed and alert. Books come in handy when you're stuck waiting, so have some in the diaper bag to fill time sitting at the doctor's office or standing in line at the grocery store.

Here are some additional reading tips:

- Cuddling while you read helps your baby feel safe, warm and connected to you.
- Read with expression, pitching your voice higher or lower where it's appropriate or using different voices for different characters.
- Don't worry about following the text exactly. Stop once in a while and ask questions or make comments on the pictures or text.
- Babies love — and learn from — repetition, so don't be afraid of reading the same books over and over.
- As your baby gets older, encourage her to touch or hold the book.

What to read

Books should have simple, repetitive text and clear pictures. During the first few months of life, your child just likes to hear your voice, so you can read almost anything, especially books with a sing-song or rhyming text. As she gets more interested in looking at things, choose books with simple pictures against solid backgrounds.

Once she begins to grab, you can read vinyl or cloth books that have faces, bright colors and shapes. When your baby begins to respond to what's inside of books, add board books with pictures of babies or familiar objects or routines like toys and bath time. When your child starts talking, choose books that invite babies to repeat simple words or phrases.

Books with mirrors and different textures (crinkly, soft, scratchy) are also great for this age group, as well as fold-out books that can be propped up, or books with flaps that open for a surprise. Babies of any age like photo albums with pictures of people they know and love. And every baby should have a collection of nursery rhymes.

Borrow books from the library and check out their storytime just for babies.

This information is for educational purposes only and is an abridged version of a full article by KidsHealth. Tips to Grow By™ is a public service of Akron Children's Hospital. To read this complete article or see other topics, go to akronchildrens.org/tips. Photocopying of Tips to Grow By™ is prohibited. Photocopied Tips may contain outdated information. If you received a photocopy of this Tip, please call 330-543-8760.

© 2014. The Nemours Foundation/KidsHealth®. Used under license.