

If you have any questions or concerns about your premature baby because of the information found in this brochure, please talk with your doctor or nurse and contact the Infant & Toddler Connection system for your locality. The statewide phone number for information is 1-800-234-1448. A “Central Directory” is available on the Infant & Toddler Connection of Virginia website at [www.infantva.org](http://www.infantva.org)

The phone number for your local Infant and Toddler Connection program is:

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## *After the NICU:* Promoting Your Premature Baby's Development at Home



**C**ongratulations on the birth of your new baby! If your baby was born more than three weeks early, your baby is premature. Babies who are born early need special attention to support their growth and progress. This brochure will give you an idea of what to expect from a premature baby. It will also provide you with some play activities to support your baby's movement, thinking, and communication, as well as some developmental concerns to watch for and talk about with your baby's doctor.

To get a better idea of what your baby should be doing in the first few years, you need to modify your baby's age, also known as “adjusting for prematurity”. To do this, subtract the number of months your baby was born early from your baby's current age. For example if your baby is 4 months old and was born 1 month early, your baby's adjusted age is 3 months (4 months minus 1 month). We adjust for prematurity until babies are 18 to 24 months old.

Your baby's due date was \_\_\_\_\_

Your baby arrived on \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date is \_\_\_\_\_

**A:** Your baby is \_\_\_\_\_ months old right now.

**B:** Your baby arrived \_\_\_\_\_ months early.

**A – B =** \_\_\_\_\_ months.

**This is your baby's adjusted age right now.**



*Looking at toy*

## Adjusting to the World in the First Months of Life

Premature babies are not ready to face all the activity the world has to offer. As a result, your baby may....

- Get tired quickly and need additional rest.
- Confuse the day and night until a routine is established.
- Wake up or fall asleep very quickly and often.
- Have difficulty telling you when he is ready to interact with you.
- Become over stimulated by noise, light, or movement - especially if happening all at once or for too long.
- Become fussy, withdrawn or difficult to soothe when over stimulated.
- Need help staying calm. Babies use up energy by crying, which may slow growth.
- Dislike some kinds of touch, such as gentle stroking, clothing tags, or bathing.
- Want to stand. Instead, your baby should be encouraged to sit with help or play lying down.
- Need to wait to eat solid foods until 4-6 months of **adjusted** age.



*Not Ready to Play:  
Baby is over stimulated and looking away*

## Ideas to Support Development of Your Premature Baby

All babies benefit from having regular play times to move, look around and interact with people and toys. You should set up a time to play with your baby each day. For example: after every daytime diaper change play with your baby for 5-10 minutes. As your baby gets older, try to make playtime a little longer. Because you are your baby's best teacher, here are some ways you can help your baby learn about the world through play:

- Cuddle and talk with your baby face to face when he is awake and ready to socialize.
- Follow your baby's lead, taking breaks when he gets sleepy, over stimulated, or wide-eyed.
- Limit distractions for your baby and keep the room quiet during play time. Turn off the TV and radio.
- Once your baby can look at you and watch your face, show him toys to look at and follow with his eyes, like rattles, brightly colored pictures and stuffed animals.
- Encourage tummy time, or playing on your baby's stomach, when he is awake. Start tummy time with your baby on his tummy on your chest, while you lie down. When your baby can lift his head a little, place him on a firm, flat surface like a blanket on the floor.
- Limit opportunities for your baby to stand on your lap, in jumpers, walkers and activity centers.
- Always consider your baby's abilities and adjusted age when you plan play activities.



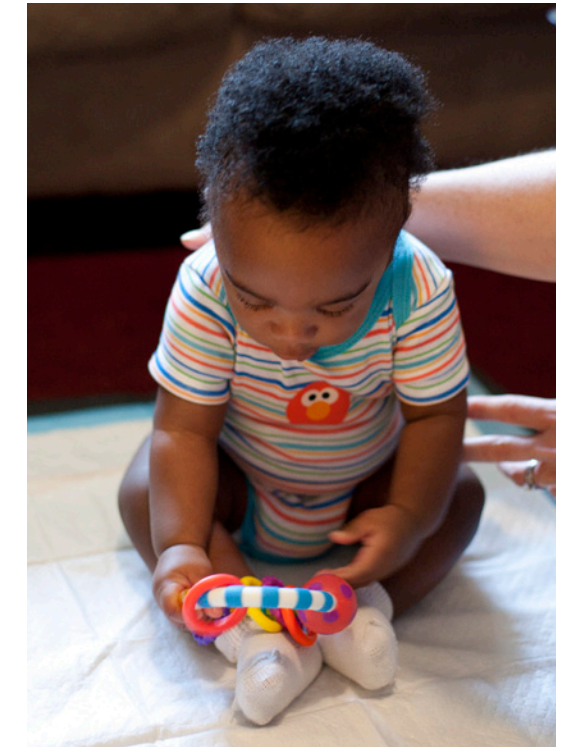
*Ready to Play:  
Baby is relaxed and looking at a toy*

## Developmental Concerns

Some babies who were born prematurely do things that may need to be evaluated. If you see your baby doing any of these behaviors discuss it with your doctor and ask about the possible need for early intervention. You can also contact your local Infant & Toddler Connection program directly (800 234-1448).

- Not waking up prior to feeding at 1 month of adjusted age.
- Feeding that takes longer than 20 minutes at 1 month of adjusted age.
- Formula or breast milk leaking out of the mouth with feeding at 2 months of adjusted age.
- Inability to self calm after 4 months of adjusted age.
- Does not like being held, arches his back, or pushes away.
- Body or legs are stiff and difficult to bend, making it hard to put him in a sitting position.
- Unable to localize a sound or follow a face or toy by 2 months of adjusted age.
- Prefers his head to be turned to one side, or you notice flattening on one side of the back of his head.
- Unable to keep his head in the middle while lying on his back by 3 months of adjusted age.
- Unable to lift his head up and look around when on his tummy by 3 months of adjusted age.
- Inability to lift his legs up in the air, or kick by 2 months of adjusted age.
- Inability to bring his hand to his mouth by 3 months of adjusted age.
- Your baby gags, chokes or spits out solid foods at 6 months of adjusted age.

One behavior that needs immediate attention is breath holding which causes your baby's skin color to become pale, blue or gray while feeding. **This means your baby is having difficulty breathing, and is a medical emergency.**



*Sitting with help and reaching for toys*



*Tummy time takes practice*