



Play

Play is very important for all children - it is how they learn and helps them to develop many skills. Prematurely born children, in particular, may need active encouragement to help them develop some skills.

Offering a variety of experiences and toys to children enables them to improve their fine and gross motor skills, and can help with their speech development.

In this issue of Austprem Ink, we present to you some ideas that may help you to find toys and games to enhance your child's development. The toys listed are not in any particular order, and there is some overlap between the age groups; especially if your child has any delays or motor difficulties. Not all of the ideas presented will be suitable for all children, but we hope you and your children have some fun trying them out!

by Anita Stergiou and Kirsten Burkitt

Play for Premature Neonatal Infants

Birth to Term

Even extremely premature babies can benefit from play as long as the baby is ready to interact with you. In fact it can be critical to balance out the "negative touch, light and sound" interactions that they must endure whilst being cared for in the NICU and replacing them with "positive" ones.

Play at this stage of "gestational development" is extremely simple and requires little in the way of "toys".

Baby is receptive to *play* during his brief "quietly awake" periods. In healthy prems, these quietly awake periods commence from around 32 weeks gestation. However, if baby is very sick or on drugs that cause drowsiness then these quietly awake periods may not occur before term. Some babies may exhibit this state at earlier gestations.

Invitation signals indicating baby's readiness to *play* during quietly awake periods include:

Baby's face is relaxed, eyes are open and appear bright;

Baby is awake and quiet in an alert state;

Baby can look at you and focus on your face, and can look away and then back again;

Baby's arms and legs are relaxed, curving towards body;

Baby may bring hands gently toward face;

Baby's breathing is easy and regular and lips may purse as if saying "ooh".

Activities that are appropriate during this state include:

Reading, singing and talking to baby in a gentle, calm, soft and reassuring voice;

Showing baby different photographs of faces especially of family members;

Showing baby flash cards (only don't flash them) - black and white line drawings / patterns especially if they are curved, spiral type images;

Gentle but firm touch (no tickling or hard rubbing). Gentle but firm touch includes holding, stroking and simple long stroke massage if baby is stable, using a light pure oil like good quality sweet almond is good for scaly skin too.

Try to keep *play* activities to one at a time initially and then try adding another keeping an eye on whether or not baby has had enough or too much is happening at once. Baby will tell you when he has had enough or is overwhelmed by breathing hard or having breathing pauses, heartbeat becomes unusually fast or slow, skin colour becomes pale, flushed, dusky or fluctuates. Yawning, hiccoughing, gagging, spitting-up, "startling" or straining as if with a bowel motion may also be signals that baby has had enough.

If baby says "time out" then just holding him quietly and relax until baby is ready to *play* again or shows that he is drifting into a sleep state.

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Play (continued)

Shielding baby's eyes from bright overhead lights during *play* can make it easier for baby to focus your face as well as on pictures, flash cards. Taping flash cards and pictures to the side of baby's isolette or cot will enable him to look at them when you're not there and changing them daily will give baby variety to look at.

When *play* session is over it's important to resettle baby into a curved, curled-up or foetal position to help him feel secure and relaxed. If baby has become distressed swaddle or snugly wrap and encourage baby to self soothe by drawing his hands toward his face so that he can suck on his fingers or fist (alternately use a dummy).

Positioning and soothing is critical because baby cannot get into a comfortable position on his own and over time, positioning affects baby's motor development.

Babies

The first year

Young babies are beginning to become more aware of their environment.

Slowly moving objects will attract their attention, as well as bold patterns and bright colours. Basic is best, detailed pictures are more appropriate a little later.

As they grow and are able to grasp objects and start to mouth everything they come in contact with, objects with different textures provide a great sensory experience. Rough or smooth, bumpy or soft, noisy or quiet, all provide your baby with a different sensation.

Some toy and game suggestions for babies are:

Mobiles - great for above the change table!

Foot finder and/or wrist rattles;

Mirrors;

Skwish balls;

Teething toys with different textures;

Playmats;

Play Gyms for baby to lie under - they can practice batting at toys with their hands and/or feet;

Soft blocks with contrasting colours and stimulating patterns;

Soft toys with clips to hang from the pram hood can provide your baby with something to look at while you are out and about.

As your baby grows (from about 6 months or so) they might also enjoy:

Shape sorting toys - excellent for their visual perception and motor skills;

Pop-up toys;

Knob jigsaw puzzles;

Balls, to roll and chase after;

Ride on and pushing toys can encourage gross motor development.

Toddlers and Pre-schoolers

1 - 4 years

Once your baby starts to walk, a whole new world opens up and they want to investigate every part of it. As s/he grows they like to imitate everything their parents do, so "pretend" toys are great for this age group.

"Pretend" toys can help speech development as often children will play out conversations and situations that are familiar to them. These toys can include everything from dolls to kitchen equipment, brooms and vacuum cleaners and gardening supplies. Cars, trucks and other vehicles are great for

encouraging children to make noises, as are animal figures. Toy telephones can encourage conversations too.

Bubble blowing is great fun and can help with some speech problems.

Playdough is an excellent and fun way to strengthen hand muscles, and you can mix sand or rice with it for a different texture which can provide great sensory feedback.

Small blocks for building and stacking.

Lego - duplo size, great for fine motor and manipulative skills.

Peg boards with large pegs.

Activity centres/boards/boxes with a variety of activities such as switches, doors, spinning wheels.

Nesting cups - round ones are easier as they don't need to be oriented correctly to fit inside each other, square ones offer more of a challenge.

Pounding or hammering toys.

Lacing boards.

Reactive toys - when the child pushes a button or part of the toy, the toy does something (makes a sound, pops up etc).

Doll houses, with furniture and people.

Simple train sets, the wooden ones with magnetic couplings can be easier for a young child to manage than ones with rails and more intricate couplings.

Musical instruments are great for this age group, not everyone will keep the beat, but many will enjoy playing along with their favourite cd or video.

Outdoor toys include ride in cars, tricycles, bicycles with training wheels and activity gyms. Tricycles with a "parent handle" can help make learning to pedal and steer a little easier.

Play (continued)

Balls (not too small) are important for practicing throwing, catching and kicking.

Matching, sequencing and counting games are fun for older toddlers.

Drawing (with pencils, textas and crayons) and painting should be introduced to young children, although they will begin with scribbles, they will start to be able to copy simple objects, usually starting with a line or circle, and later will draw people and houses and other items from their environment. By the time they start school, many children can write their name, and are aware of the connection between pictures and letters and reading and writing.

Magnetic boards with letters, shapes or people.

Felt boards.

Dominoes.

Lotto type matching games.

A sand pit can provide many experiences from the obvious sensory one to the motor skills involved in digging, pouring and shaping the sand.

Dress ups.

Swimming is an excellent activity for helping with muscle tone and strength as well as co-ordination.

School Children

5 years +

School age children often like a challenge. They usually enjoy playing with other children, but will also like activities they can work at on their own.

Lego - the "regular" size product is now appropriate and enables children to build any number of different things. Pushing the pieces together and separating them again can be great for hand muscle strength.

Magnetix - balls, bars, squares and triangle pieces that stick together magnetically.

Meccano - the junior Meccano (plastic, larger pieces) can be good to start with, older children with more developed fine motor skill will enjoy the traditional product.

Trampolines - be careful! The newer round ones with a net surrounding them are supposed to be a little safer.

Bicycles - many children can manage without training wheels by age 5 – 6, but those with delays can take longer.

A football, cricket set or other sport set - ball handling skills can be difficult to master, as can the eye-hand co-ordination

required by many bat and ball games. Practice tends to help so the more children are exposed to these type of games, the more likely they are to become comfortable with them.



References:

Hatcher & Lehman with Centering Corporation, *Baby Talk for Parents Who Are Getting to Know Their Special Care Baby*, Centering Corporation, Omaha New England, 1985

Davis, B., *Developmentally Supportive Care A Guide for Parents*, KEMH, Subiaco, 1998

Brazy, J.E., <http://www.pediatrics.wisc.edu/patientcare/preemies/>, University of Wisconsin and the Centre for Perinatal Care, Menter Hospital, Maddison, Wisconsin, 1996



Books for Children

Books are great for all children, and while they won't really help motor skills they can certainly help to increase vocabulary. Younger children might enjoy "lift-the-flap" type books and some of the touchy-feely books that are available.

Reading to children is also a great time for togetherness. Look carefully at the detail of pictures and discuss the story together. You can incorporate a story as part of the bed time routine from a very early age.

Safety

Toys need to be appropriate for the age of the child, and most importantly safe. Watch out for younger children accessing the toys belonging to older siblings or friends. Look for toys that :

- are strong and sturdy
- are unlikely to have small bits break off
- are non-toxic
- have no sharp points or edges
- are too large to be swallowed (especially important for under 3's or those who still put toys in their mouths)
- have no parts that could pinch or entrap fingers

Your Favourite Toys

Some of the favourite toys of Austprem members are:

Babies:

Zachary (9 1/2 months) loves his Lamaze puppy which barks when you squeeze his nose.

Emily (6 months) would love a doll.

Imogen (5 months) loves to sit in her swing.

Dechlan (10 weeks) enjoys lying under his Fisher Price Kick and Crawl Aquarium - he has quite a good aim with his feet already!



Toddlers and Pre-Schoolers:

Emma (3) likes to cuddle her Cabbage Patch doll, Tabitha

Mitchell (2) loves Woody from Toy Story.

Kane and Cooper (2) and Isaac (4) like to play with their parents best! They also enjoy their outdoor activity gym - on hot days they plug the hose in and have a cool fun park.

Logan (19.5 months) currently enjoys his teddy bear "Teddy Snow Bear" who is just the right size (30cm tall) for cuddling in bed.

Mathew (1) likes his "push and go" car (where you push down on the driver and let go to see it move), a "Pet Me Platypus" from Neurosmith, which plays classical music, and a Wiggles guitar.

Charlotte (almost 2) enjoys cuddling her Winnie-the-Pooh (or anything to do with Pooh!), and also likes puzzles and Mega Blocks or Lego.

Marlee (4 1/2) loves her Barbie of Swan Lake doll.

Cooper (1 1/2) likes to play with anything breakable! He also has a lot of fun with his toy lawn mower.

Coby (2) has fun with his Thomas the Tank Engine train set (or anything Thomas really!)

Shea (2) has fun with Pooh Bear in three different sizes!

Jessica (4) loves to play with her My Little Pony stuffed toy (small beanie size). Drawing and computer games are also favourites.

Liam (2) plays with motorbikes and sand toys.

Lee (22 months) loves to push his push along/ride on bike, and playing with his Tupperware shape sorter.

Riley (2) won't go anywhere without his dog, which has soft coloured paws and a clear plastic middle with little balls inside.

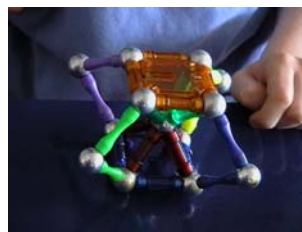
Brooke (17 months) loves her Fisher Price "Peek-a-block" train and her "Etch-a-sketch"

Jaden (3) is keen on balls of any size!



School Children:

Michael (8) likes to play with his Magnetix and would love to play with his Dad's Meccano. He enjoys playing on the computer and likes to ride his scooter to school.



Lochie (5) would like to have a Spiderman suit that shoots webs.

Rebekah (5) enjoys her Barbie dolls.

Jess (16) likes the Sony Playstation.

Millie (13) enjoys playing computer games.

Connor (6) has fun with Lego.

Brice (9) and Hayden (6) love their Lego Bionicles.

Lewis (11) and Kyle (11) prefer to spend their time being active with their friends or on the sports field.

Online suppliers of special needs toys

<http://www.windmill.net.au/>

Browse the catalogue online (limited pics), or have a copy sent to you FREE! Stores in VIC, SA, TAS and WA.

<http://www.tecsol.com.au/Toys.htm>

Switch adapted toys, as well as many others for children with special needs. Will also modify toys to suit your child's needs.

<http://www.edex.com.au/>

An educational resource shop, with a wide range of toys.

Website Reviews

<https://www.askdrsears.com/kids2home.asp>

This site includes links to the 5 main developmental play stages, as well as Dr Sears Top Ten Tips for Interactive Play

<http://www.familyeducation.com/article/0,1120,64-11684,00.html>

'Play at Different Ages and Developmental Stages', broken down into sections for Infants, Toddlers, Preschoolers and School-Age Children (up to age 8).

<http://www.aare.edu.au/98pap/har98238.htm>

A therapeutic model of play by Elspeth Harley.

This paper looks at a group of 4 - 5 year olds, both 'players' and 'non-players' and looked at developing a therapeutic model of play for use in preschool settings to assist preschool teachers in the developmental assessment of play

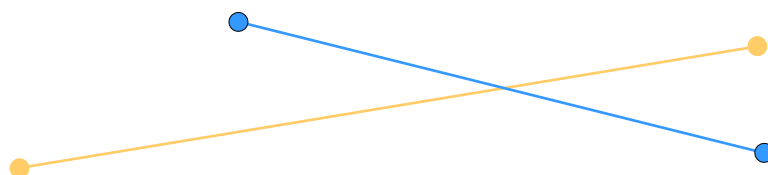
http://www.toy-tia.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Library/Publications_Resources1/Lets_Play/LetsPlay2004.pdf

Let's Play : a guide to toys for children with special needs

A comprehensive guide which looks at many toys and gives them a code for which special needs they might be appropriate for (including special needs, developmental disabilities, physical impairment, hearing impairment, blind/low vision etc. It is American, so not all the toys will be available here, but you might be able to find a toyshop to order something in for you, or be able to buy a toy online if you are interested. The links on page 4 might give you a starting point.

<http://www.lekotek.org/resources/informationontoy/tentips.html>

Top 10 Tips for selecting a toy for a child with disabilities



Books for Adults

Baby games : the joyful guide to child's play from birth to three years and

Kid's games : a parents' guide to playing with your three to six-year-old

Martin, Elaine

These two titles are full of great idea for creative games and play. They include the words to many rhymes and songs, and details of the actions that go with them, as well as practical ideas for play using many household items.

TV-free activities for kids

Hodges, Di

Heaps of ideas for practical things to do at home, including playdough recipes and sections on 'Language and literacy' and 'Outdoor play'.

Look for these and other similar titles at your local library or bookshop, to get a wide range of ideas.

Prematurity in the Press

This Austprem group is an online forum where summaries/abstracts of articles in journals, print/online media and book reviews etc that feature issues about prematurity will be posted. Where possible links to the full text of the article will also be included, but this depends on the availability of the article and Copyright. This group will be a semi-public group, non-members will be able to read forum, but only members can post articles to the group and join in any subsequent discussions.

For information on joining see <http://www.austprem.org.au/pip.html>

Pregnancy Support Group

The Austprem – Pregnancy Support Group has been set up for those who are contemplating or experiencing a pregnancy following a preterm birth, and for those at risk of giving birth prematurely.

Everyone is welcome to join Austprem – Pregnancy Support Group. You might be pregnant again, you might just be thinking about another pregnancy or you might have already completed a subsequent pregnancy and want to support someone else who is just starting on the journey. Sharing your thoughts and experiences might just help another mother, and support is what Austprem is all about.

You can find information about joining Austprem – Pregnancy Support Group at

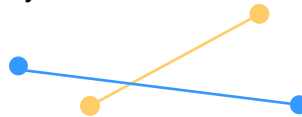
<http://www.austprem.org.au/psg.html>

Chats

Chats are a great way to get to know other members better. They are usually held on Thursdays (not in January) and Sunday nights from about 9pm (Eastern Time). Late chats, from 9pm WA time are held on the 2nd and 4th Sundays of each month. A reminder is posted to the Austprem Forum the day before a chat, so check there for the exact time. The chats are held in the Austprem Chat Room on the mc2 site, so only Austprem members are able to attend.

"You can turn up in your pj's and you don't need a babysitter"

Chats are very informal - you can turn up in your pj's (who's going to know?) and you don't need a babysitter. But you can still receive great support and understanding from other parents, or just have a social chat - a bonus if you have been isolated at home all day.



Great Gift Idea!

Pass the code onto your family and friends - anyone may use it!



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More details from

http://www.austprem.org.au/promotion/you_name_it_fundraising.html



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Contacting the Committee


If you need to contact any of the Committee, please email them by clicking on their name in the Members list of the mc2 group, or send an email to

austprem@austprem.org.au

and it will be forwarded to the appropriate person.

Happy Birthday wishes to:

December

2 Max (14)
3 Christopher (8)
6 Rhiannon (7)
6 Rebekah (5)
6 Brock (1)
9 Annabelle (3)
10 Coen (5)
10 Zoe (1)
11 Connor (6)
12 Olivia (1)
12 Isaac (1) 
13 Nicholas
15 Mathew (1)
16 Jess (16)
17 Hannah (7)
21 Elaina (3)
28 Jack (3)
29 Liam (7)
29 Morgan (2)

January

2 Leonie (6)
3 Charlotte (2)
7 Dylan (2)
8 Caleb (7)
8 Zeth (3)
11 Devlyn (1)
12 Connor (5)
14 Wisaal Yasmina (3)
14 Bobby (1)
14 William (1)
15 Kaitlyn (11)
22 Hayden (1)
25 Sharon (4)
26 Chloe (2)

If you would like your children (full term and prem) added to the Birthdays page at <http://www.austprem.org.au/journey/superheroes/birthdays.html> or to be listed in the Newsletter, please email kirsten@austprem.org.au

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Donations

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P.O. Box 2157
Sunbury VIC 3429

Please include your name and address so that a receipt can be posted to you.


Donations \$2 and over are tax deductible.

Your support is greatly appreciated.

26 Nathan (1)
28 Liljana
29 Savannah (1)
29 Aidan (1)
30 Kyle (4)



February

1 Ellandi (6)
1 Kaihdyn (2)
2 Blair (6)
3 Dylan (4)
3 Elizabeth (4)
3 Lee (2)
3 Kyle 
3 Tyler (1)
4 Jessica (13)
4 Marcus (1)
5 Sophia (1)
7 Courtney (15)

7 James
9 Yolanda (11)
11 Hannah (1)
13 Chloe (7)
14 Heather (2)
14 Jayde (1)
14 Lauren (1)
14 Ryan (1) 
16 Edan
16 Joshua (4)
16 Matthew
17 Victoria (3)
18 Zackery (1)
19 Xander (1)
20 Therese (4) 
22 Liam
22 Aiden 
23 Nathan (2)
26 Thomas (6)

Joining Austprem

Austprem is an Internet based support group.

To join Austprem Inc., you will need to go to <http://www.austprem.org.au/join.html> and fill out the online membership form.

To access the online forums and chats (where most of the Austprem "action" happens), you will also need to follow the steps at <http://www.austprem.org.au/forums.html> to register with mc2 and subscribe to an Austprem group.

Join now - it is a great opportunity to share with others who have "been there" and who can understand your experiences

Membership is FREE!

Any information provided to Austprem is held in confidence and will not be used for any other purpose or given out to any third party without your permission.



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Providing friendship,
information and support for
families of premature babies
and children.

Visit our website
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Newsletter

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