Babies Need Loving Touches and Cuddles

Touch is one of the first senses to develop in a baby. In fact, it is a baby's primary sense. A simple, loving touch sends a powerful message that is essential to a baby.

Nurturing touch along with a parent's cooing:
- Promotes well-being.
- Tells baby he is cared for and loved.
- Builds trust.
- Teaches baby to communicate.

It also promotes positive parent-infant bonding – crucial for a healthy brain. Extra touch increases brain development.

Through touch, a baby learns the skill of interacting with people. Watching others teaches behaviors. Gentle loving touch teaches empathy.

Touch helps babies develop skills to cope in times of distress. When babies are stressed, they cry. A parent's loving looks and touch provide needed comfort. As the baby calms herself, she learns emotion control.

As parents meet their baby's needs, the baby develops trust. It is crucial that this bond start to develop soon after the baby's birth. Trust is a building block for learning social and emotional skills.

How can you give your baby the benefits of loving, gentle touch?

- Hold him skin-to-skin during his first few months — Kangaroo Care. Both mom and dad can do this daily. NICU staff encourage skin-to-skin for a pre-term baby's growth and development.
- Rub her tummy, back, arms and legs after her bath. Smile. Talk sweetly.
- Cuddle her when she cries. Touch your cheek to her cheek as you whisper or sing softly.

- Rub his tummy and gently pat his bottom during a diaper change. Hold his hands. Let him curl his hand around your finger.
- Learn baby massage. It is 20% technique and 80% communication. Anyone can do it.

The more parents touch and cuddle their baby, the better they meet their baby's needs. This contact improves their ability to respond to their baby with a specific action that is helpful. They learn their baby's cues. Touch strengthens a bond that will last a lifetime.

Brought to you by Parent Help Line at HSHS St. John's Children's Hospital to help keep kids safe, healthy and happy.

Parent Help Line
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