

Fact Sheet

Reading to babies and very young children

womensnewbornhealth.com.au

Does it drive you crazy when your child wants you to read the same book with them at every bedtime? Do you feel too tired to read with her before bed? Are you tempted to let him watch a video or play on his iPad rather than read with him?

All parents feel like this at some time or another. After all, reading repeatedly about the pink rabbit, or the little red truck's adventures is not that exciting.

But don't give up, reading with babies and young children is one of the most important and rewarding things you can do because:

- Reading helps babies' brain development.
- Reading increases the number of words they know and helps them learn faster.
- Reading to your baby gets them ready for learning to read.
- Reading is a fun thing to do with your child because you spend special time together.
- Reading helps emotional development. This means children learning to understand their own and other's feelings. Understanding other's feelings is called empathy.
- Reading helps social development which teaches children how to live, work and play with other people.

Your baby's brain is growing very fast and reading with them will help lay the foundations (make a start) for future learning. You can think of it like the foundation of a house or building. A strong foundation is important for a long lasting building.

When should I start reading to my baby?

Any age is suitable for starting reading and when your baby is 6 months old you should try to be reading regularly to her or him.



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How often should I read to my baby?

If possible read to your baby at least three times a week, but more is better!

To help your baby's brain grow and to assist them to develop a love of reading and learning read to them 'early and often'.

What kinds of books are best for babies?

You may have heard, or read, that for babies, 'not all books are created equal' – but what does this mean?

Studies have found that all reading is good for babies but to get the most benefit it helps to use books where the characters (even if they are cars or animals) have names. So, if your books don't name the characters, make up names for the people, creatures and things. This makes reading better for your baby and more fun for you!¹

¹ Pickron et al

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Special MRI studies that take pictures of babies' brain activity while they are being read to have shown us that if you create a story beyond the pictures or words in the books it helps build your child's imagination and may help them understand the world better.²

How can I spend more time reading with my baby or child?

- Try to set aside time each evening to read with your child before you feel too tired.
- Let your child choose the books (even if you do have to read the same one many times).
- Stop while you are reading and ask questions about the book or the pictures, or even just ask "What do you think happens next?" or "How would you end the story?"
- Encourage your child to 'read' to you. They may know a book 'off by heart' because they have heard it many times.
- Provide lots of different books – picture books, story books, poetry, nursery rhymes, books with facts about things like the stars or animals.
- Don't worry if you don't finish a story or book. Just enjoy the time with your baby.

Maybe you find reading aloud difficult or you are very busy. Words and stories are all around us and you can use these to increase reading time with your children too.

- Read signs at the shops or along the road as you drive or walk.
- Join your local library - they have so many different types of books - it's free, and they also have reading sessions for you and your child to join in.

² Hutton et al

The most important thing about reading is that it should be an enjoyable and fun time with your baby.



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Works cited in this document:

Pickron, C.B., Iyer, A., Fava, E., Scott, L.S. (2017). Learning to Individuate: The Specificity of Labels Differentially Impacts Infant Visual Attention. *Child Development*.

Hutton. Parent-Child Reading Increases Activation of Brain Networks Supporting Emergent Literacy in 3-5 Year-Old Children: An fMRI study

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