

Why is learning voice patterns important?

Studies in full term children ages two months to 36 months have shown that the more parents talk to their children, the faster their vocabularies grow and the higher the children's IQ test scores at age three.

The studies showed that children's vocabulary and IQ growth rate were strongly related to how often parents spoke to their baby, and how many words they said per hour. That factor was stronger than any other in the studies, including the parents' education levels and the family's socioeconomic status. It's true. Words count, and talking and reading with your baby in NICU will help set him or her up for greater success in the future. It's never too early to read to a child.




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Bonding with Books




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Reading to your baby

Your baby may be small, or very ill. Still, the sound of your voice can help make your baby calmer and more comfortable. The NICU is filled with a lot of noise from equipment, staff, and other babies, and your baby seeks a source of warmth and comfort that they find in the sound of your voice. It's a voice they've heard from the fifth month of pregnancy. So read to your baby quietly to provide something soothing and familiar. Sit next to your baby's bed and read aloud. Watch your baby for cues and signals that will let you know when he or she is ready for a break from story time with you.

How to Read to your baby:

- Your baby knows your voice, so this is something ONLY you can do.
- On days when you can't hold your baby, you can still provide love and comfort through reading. Try reading the same book every time you visit.
- Reading makes for a nice tradition you can start right away.
- Use a low whisper when you read to your baby.



- Read for 10 – 15 minutes in a low whisper.
- Look at your baby's face.
- Let your baby grasp your finger.
- Read during touch or gavage feeding times.
- Read during kangaroo care or while holding your baby.
- Make up your own stories.
- Use nursery rhymes, singing and humming to help your baby sleep.
- Continue to read to your baby at home, at least five times a week.
- Include siblings in reading and let them help pick out books for baby brother or sister.

Look for baby's readiness. It's time to read when:

- Your baby has relaxed arms and legs
- The baby is sucking on fingers and hands.
- He or she is awake and quiet.
- Your baby's eyes are open and he or she is looking around.

Look for baby stress signs:

- You notice an increase or drop in your baby's heart rate.
- The baby's skin turning pale or blue.
- The baby is frowning or yawning.
- You see an increase in fussiness or crying.
- The baby is arching his or her back
- He or she is making a motion like a salute.
- His or her fingers are spread out wide.

** If your baby is stressed, let him or her rest in a quiet, dimly lit area. Premature babies tend to prefer a firm, still touch instead of light stroking or rubbing.*



Did you know...?

- Preterm infants showed 85% fewer desaturation events during parental bedside reading than without reading exposure.
- This effect persisted up to one hour after reading exposure.
- Reading time improves parent-baby bonding.
- Time spent reading to your baby decreases parental stress.
- This pleasant ritual helps establish good parental routines.
- When you read to your baby, you're helping to strengthen brain growth for processing language.
- Hearing your words and stories helps to jump-start an infant's vocalization and vocabulary development.

Even before birth, babies instinctively start listening to and learning the pattern of their mother's voice. If a baby is born prematurely and must spend time in the NICU, that baby is missing out on crucial development time they would normally have in utero, listening to their mother's voice. But you can still talk with your baby, and reading gives him or her that time to learn your voice patterns.