



Why are the five senses important for child development

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BABY DEVELOPMENT ARTICLES

ARTICLE

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Babies are born with all the necessary senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. However, these senses may need to be stimulated to ensure better motor skills and memory.

One of the earliest senses to develop in the womb is the sense of smell.

When babies are born, they are fully equipped with all the necessary senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch¹. However, all these senses are not equally developed--some are less precise than others. For example, a baby's eyes are a little more than half the size of an adult's eyes. But unlike sight, hearing is fully developed in them. Studies have also shown that babies have a strong sense of smell and they prefer sweet tastes over sour or bitter tastes².

As the babies grow, it is wonderful to have them see, smell, hear, touch and taste the world around them. Parents play a huge role in their child's development of the five senses and contribute plenty of stimuli to engage these senses.

Making scents of the world around them

One of the earliest senses to develop in the womb is the sense of smell, says Alan Greene, M.D., clinical professor of paediatrics at Stanford University School of Medicine and author of Raising Baby Green.

“By the end of the first trimester baby can smell foods that Mom is eating,” he says. And by the end of the first week of life, an infant’s nose can even tell the difference between the scent of his mother’s breast milk and that of another mom!

In fact, Greene adds that a baby placed on their mother’s belly right after birth will work their way up to the breast for the first nursing, navigating simply by the sense of smell. How amazing is that?

That magic touch

Surprisingly, the sense of touch develops in a baby when they are still in the womb itself. “Babies push and pull, touch their own faces and explore the lining of the womb,” says Greene. During the first few months of life, your baby will be very reliant on you for tactile stimulation.

That is why skin-to-skin contact feels especially comforting to your baby. This is also why putting your baby in a tight swaddle will often keep them calm, recreating the snug feeling of the womb.

In fact, the sense of touch is beneficial to both you and your baby. Touching in a gentle and loving manner will cause the hormone oxytocin, also known as the “love hormone,” to be released, encouraging bonding³.

See it to believe it

Your baby’s eyesight will develop gradually over the first six or seven months of life. By about seven months, their eyesight will be mature, which will lead to the further development of hand-eye coordination and depth perception.

Tip: Make eye contact with your child to help him focus on your face. This helps with developing their eyesight.

Shhh. The baby can hear you!

If your baby is affected by even a soft noise, don't be too surprised. A baby's hearing is better than an adult's. In fact, their sense of hearing is up and running even before birth. "They really pay attention to noises outside the womb, and studies have shown that they do recognize mom's voice," says Greene.

Hearing-related memory is amazingly deep in babies, adds Greene. A study found that babies could even recognise a song their mothers played while they were still in the womb a year after the birth!

Tip: Make sure little ones aren't exposed to loud noises, such as blaring music or power tools, that could damage their hearing.

A taste for the finer things in life

If you eat plenty of foie gras when pregnant, your child might come out with a tendency to like foie gras too! Taste buds are fully formed at birth, and little ones naturally prefer sweet over salty flavours⁴.

"A lot of research suggests moms should try to eat a broad and varied healthy diet during pregnancy," says Nancy Tringali Piho, author of *My Two-Year-Old Eats Octopus: Raising Children Who Love to Eat Everything*. "And since babies do get flavours through breast milk, moms should continue to eat a wide variety of foods while breastfeeding."

How these can help your child's brain development

All of their senses and how us parents contribute to them is called multisensorial stimulation. Multisensorial stimulation promotes the long-term survival of synaptic connections during brain development, giving way to better memory and motor skills as your child develops⁵.

And all of this happens within your baby's first 3 years of life! During this essential period of their life, there is rapid development of most of the brain's neural pathways supporting communication, social development, understanding, and emotional well-being⁶, making multisensorial stimulation really important for parents to focus on during their child's early developmental years.

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