

Chicago Parent

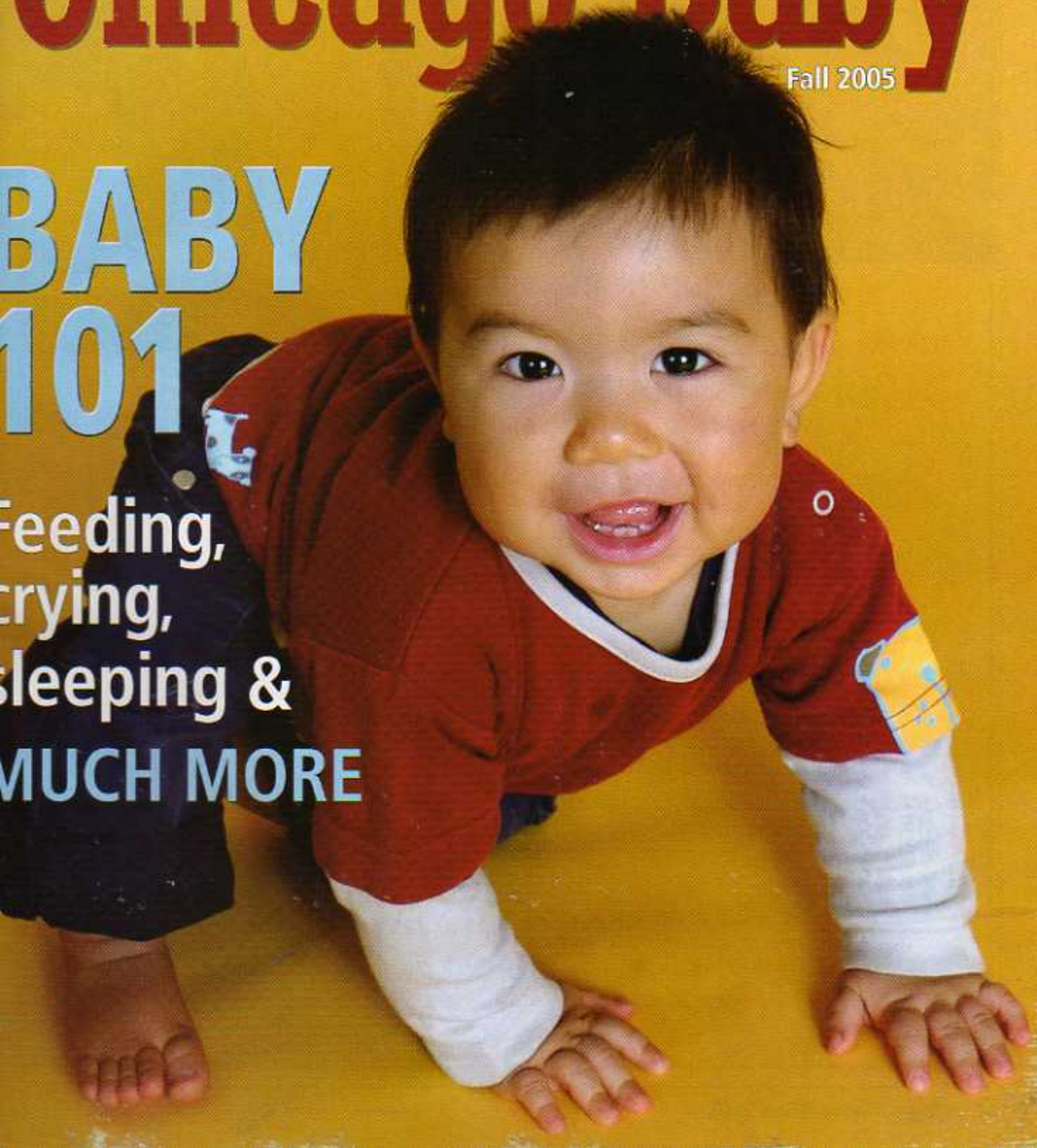
FREE

# Chicago Baby

Fall 2005

## BABY 101

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Crying,  
Sleeping &  
MUCH MORE



# Play with your baby

*How to stimulate your child's development from 0 to 6 months*

BY ALICE HOHL  
PHOTOS BY JOSH HAWKINS

**H**ow does a parent know what to do with a new baby who seems hardly able to do anything? Even though they seem helpless, we know those wonderful minds are working overtime as babies go through critical development stages.

This can make even experienced parents head to the books to find out if they are doing the right thing to stimulate their baby's nerves, muscles and brain.

But doctors say it's less important to compare your child to guidelines in a book—or other people's kids—than to understand what *your* baby can do. Then, play games with her that match her skills. Because the one universal truth for babies

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*Alice Hohll, a former Chicago-area mom, now lives in Ohio with her husband and 9-month-old daughter.*



Taisei Pinc of Oak Park, 10 months, went through all of the development markers with a lot of play and love.

is that they need a parent's attention.

"Enjoy the sheer pleasure of playing with your child," says Dr. Alan Rosenblatt, a specialist in neurodevelopmental pediatrics on Chicago's North Side.

Parents should be familiar with developmental milestones, Rosenblatt says, but shouldn't force their baby to hit those milestones. Instead, help your baby grow by letting her try new things through play.

When my daughter was a few months old, I would prop her on my knees and have her "give me five." At first I had to wiggle my hands to get her attention and wait several minutes until her little brain could propel her hand forward to mine.

But by 5 months, all I had to do was put my hands up and she would reach out and pat them. As her grasping skills increased, I could hold up toys for her to grab, pull and hold. It's all building on the same skill.

Here are other activities to help your baby learn and grow, collected from doctors, moms and books:

## Birth to 1 month

When babies come home from the hospital, it seems they're barely awake long enough to do anything but eat and cry. But here are things you can do.

■ **Make eye contact.** "You look into the baby's face; you mirror the baby's face—it's really important for infant development, and it's something most parents are drawn to do," says Amanda Woodward, a University of Chicago psychology professor.

■ **Try tummy time.** Get your back-sleeping baby comfortable on her tummy, where she will learn key motor skills later.

■ **Make faces.** See if your baby copies you.

■ **Put things in your baby's hand.** He will grasp them by reflex, and will learn about different textures.

■ **Use a baby sling.** Babies carried close to the body receive more interaction, Woodward says. But don't use a frame-style backpack until a baby can sit up unassisted for a few moments.

■ **Push your baby in the stroller.** This allows him to see new things.

## 1 to 2 months

■ **Try lap time.** If you can get your baby to bend at the waist, he'll likely sit on your lap with support.

My husband and I would play cards in the evenings, trading off holding the baby. She liked looking at the colored playing cards, too.

■ **Show him his reflection.** Either hold your baby up to the mirror, or use a safety mirror

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# Is your baby falling behind?

It's natural for parents to monitor their infant's development. And if a baby isn't progressing normally, it's important to catch it early. But experts say parents shouldn't get too caught up in when babies are supposed to hit developmental milestones—those are just averages.

"For things like motor development, a big determiner is weight," says Amanda Woodward, a psychology professor at the University of Chicago. "Chubby babies are going to tend to do those things later. It doesn't mean they are physically inept, it just means physics isn't on their side right now. They'll get there."

Dr. Alan Rosenblatt, a neurodevelopmental pediatrics specialist in Chicago, says most kids do develop within a normal range. But it's parents' instincts, rather than guidelines in books, that are usually correct.

So parents who have concerns should voice them. "If a child is veering off course, the idea is to identify them early on," says Rosenblatt. Kids with developmental problems often show other warning signs, such as holding one arm or leg funny. A child who consistently displays a skill then regresses should see a doctor.

The Illinois Early Intervention Program helps parents decide if they need to see a specialist. Visit [www.dhs.state.il.us/ei](http://www.dhs.state.il.us/ei).

Forest Park mom Jeannie Shay says she'd rather spend time playing with her son, T.J., than worrying about whether he'll roll over at the right time.

"We really take a common-sense attitude toward parenting," she says. "Why freak out about something I don't need to freak out about?"

*Alice Hohl*



# Play with your baby

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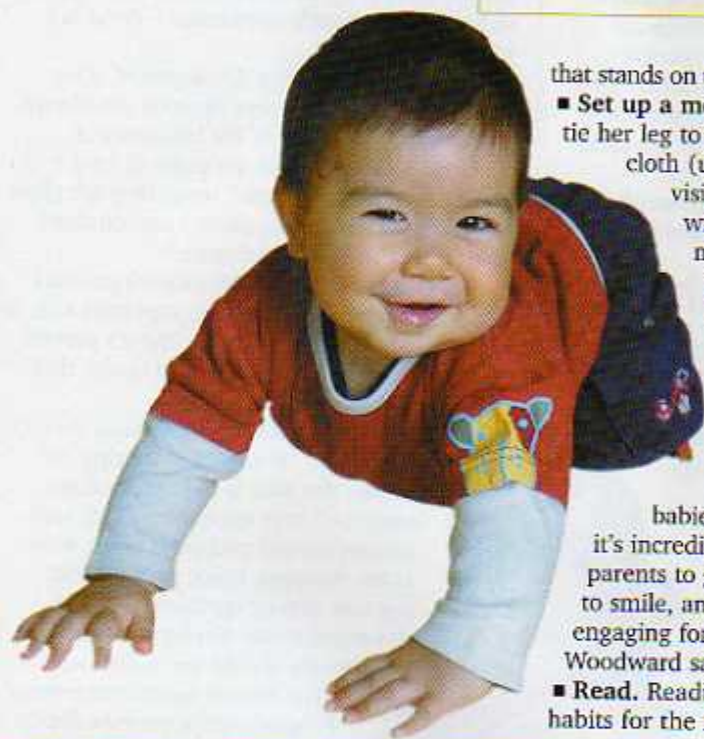
## Play doesn't have to be pricey

**T**oy stores are full of expensive products claiming to help you make the most of time with your baby. But the relationship you build by playing with your child is far more important than what you buy, says Amanda Woodward, a psychology professor at the University of Chicago.

"One thing I always say is, 'Don't get too hung up on equipment,'" Woodward says. "People have been raising babies forever without toys. Toys are nice, but you shouldn't think if you don't have the latest set of black-and-white baby toys ... that somehow you aren't doing [it] right.

"The most important thing is social interaction, and the only way you can get that is with a person."

Alice Hohl



that stands on the floor.

■ **Set up a moving mobile.** Or, tie her leg to a mobile with soft cloth (under close supervision). See if she will kick her leg to move the mobile.

Connecting cause and effect is an early form of learning.

■ **Work for smiles.** "At around 6 weeks, when

babies begin to smile, it's incredibly engaging for parents to get their babies to smile, and it's incredibly engaging for babies, too,"

Woodward says.

■ **Read.** Reading builds good habits for the future. The

moment I opened a book, my daughter would quiet down. Now that she is older, she helps turn the pages.

## 2 to 3 months

■ **Play ball.** Attempts to bat and swipe at objects are your baby's way of learning cause and effect.

■ **Talk to each other.** The back-and-forth of imitating baby talk, or narrating your activities and pausing for his input, teaches a baby that in conversation, people take turns making noise.

■ **Touch.** Babies learn the difference between "me" and "not me" by touching their hands and face, and you.

■ **Try Velcro mittens.** A recent study showed babies who were given special mittens so they could "grab" objects before they had the motor skills to do so learned faster.

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## 3 to 4 months

- **Make noise.** Shake a rattle or sing to see how long it takes him to turn to you.
- **Practice tracking.** Move brightly colored items in and out of her field of vision. Your baby is beginning to match up input from her five senses, such as hearing something and seeing the source of the noise.
- **Walk your baby around the house.** He is learning to recognize places by lighting, smell and colors.

"Enjoy the sheer pleasure of playing with your child."

**DR. ALAN ROSENBLATT**  
Neurodevelopmental pediatric specialist, Chicago

- **Help your baby "stand" on your lap.** Jeannie Shay, of Forest Park, says her son, T.J., now 6 months old, loved this. "He want[ed] to stand all the time."

## 4 to 5 months

At this age, most babies are still stuck wherever you lay them down, but some roll a bit. For my daughter, 4 months marked the beginning of some fun interaction.

- **Practice sitting.** Try having your baby sit up in a stroller rather than reclining in a buggy or car seat. If he slumps over, try again in a few weeks.
- **Get her giggling.** Peek-a-boo is a great baby-pleaser but you need to repeat and repeat. Repetition and suspense are key to getting those giggles.
- **Work those legs.** Walkers are discouraged for safety reasons. Try an exersaucer, which provides the same stimulation, but the baby can't move across the room and pull a lamp on his head or fall down the stairs.
- **Kick.** This builds motor skills and abdominal muscles needed for sitting.

## 5 to 6 months

Now your baby is really getting fun. Here are some new games to try:

- **Fall-down-go-boom.** Although she probably can't sit or stand alone, hold your baby's hands and help her to a sitting, then standing, position on a soft surface. When she starts to topple, let her fall safely, cheering her on. This builds muscles, and learning early that

falling softly isn't always cause for crying can be useful.

- **Wiggling animals.** At this age my daughter started playing with hand-held toys, so a stuffed zebra and camel often traveled in our diaper bag. Jiggling them in front of her face brought a big smile, followed by the total concentration it took for her to reach out, grab the camel and stuff its face in her mouth. ☺

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