

# BABY BYTES

For families with infants and young children

## Highchair Play

Highchair play provides your child with the opportunity to play in a supported sitting position from a young age. This positioning helps with sitting balance and offers support for your baby to use both hands in play. It encourages hands to the centre or midline, where they can see them. Highchair play also provides an opportunity for more focused, concentrated play i.e. puzzles, crayons, play dough.



## DID YOU KNOW???

- Sitting in a highchair for some play activities gives your baby a chance to move her/his arms, hands, and fingers more freely than they can on the floor. They can then focus on using their hands to learn and discover things, and don't have to worry about falling over.
- If your baby slides forward out of the seat, try putting a piece of non-slip matting on the seat, such as the kind you buy to use as a grip to open jars. Provide side and/or back supports (such as a rolled-up towel or piece of firm foam) if your child needs a little more support than the highchair offers.
- You will be able to offer your baby more challenging fine motor toys when they are sitting in the highchair than when they are sitting on the floor, e.g. they likely will be better able to grasp and move the knobs and buttons on a busy box when sitting in the highchair.

## HELPING DEVELOP HAND SKILLS

**Transferring Toys:** Releasing or transferring a toy from one hand to the other is an early two-handed play skill.

**Banging Toys Together:** Toys that can be banged together will help to develop early skills in coordinating hands together in play (e.g. blocks).

**Clapping Games:** Clapping games such as pat-a-cake are early two-sided coordination activities that bring the hands together in midline. There are many songs that encourage clapping (e.g. "If you're happy and you know it clap your hands").

**Apart/Together Activities:** Simple toys that involve taking apart and putting together help children begin to coordinate the movements of both hands in midline (e.g. linking chains, pop beads, bristle blocks, travel toothbrush holder).

**Sensory Activities:** These activities focus on a variety of touch experiences, e.g. playing with play dough, water, sand, shaving cream, bins of dried beans or cotton balls. Since a baby's natural desire is to put their hands in their food and in their mouth, consider foods, such as pudding, jello, pureed fruits and vegetables, as fun sensory experience that provide a variety of textures and tastes.

**Books:** Holding a book with one hand while turning pages with the other hand encourages two-sided coordination. Don't worry if at first your child turns several pages at once. They may not have the finger dexterity yet to isolate individual pages, but with practice this will come. You can add tabs to the edge of the page, or glue a bit of sponge between the pages to separate them so they can be more easily turned.

**Grasp Strengthening Ideas:** Large tongs; pulling apart Velcro; pull tubes; sponges in water; spray bottle; searching for toys in play dough; squeeze balls; large bag saver clips; squirt/squeeze toys.

**Later Activities:** Toys with Moving Parts; Lacing Activities; Paper and Pencil Activities

## LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Highchair play is also a great opportunity to focus on language development. When your little one is in the highchair, they are at eye level with you. This is great positioning for getting great eye contact, which encourages interaction, modeling opportunities and back and forth sound play.

- Imitate your baby's laughter, facial expression and sounds
- Encourage imitation of mouth, tongue, eye and hand movements
- Imitate your child's action with another object ... adding sounds

*Source: Fine Motor Skills in Children with Down Syndrome, Maryanne Bruni, 2006*