

Baby Bonding

Months until your due date?
It's never too early to start the
mother-baby connection.

by Lissa Poirot

NINE MONTHS CAN SEEM LIKE AN eternity when you are looking forward to meeting your precious cargo, but that doesn't mean you can't begin to bond with her before she makes her debut. By your baby's 16th week in the womb, she can hear and respond to the sound of your voice, music and loud noises. She's paying attention to every move you make. What you do before she is born can establish a positive bonding experience, as well as contribute to her physical, emotional and mental health. What can you do to start the bonding and learning process early?

You can start becoming a great mom before your baby is even born.

Rub your Buddha Belly. By your baby's 24th week, she will respond to patting or stroking of your belly and the stimulation, including an increased heart rate, is like exercise for her. While she's getting to know you, this exercise can make her more active as an infant with strong muscles and a greater chance at holding her head up, grabbing, crawling and just plain old moving earlier than babies who didn't get the same stimulation from mom.

Look Who's Talking. The sound of your voice isn't just a way for your baby to become familiar and comfortable with you, it will help him grow big and strong. A study conducted more than two decades ago found that talking to your baby while he's in the womb resulted in an infant who

was more alert, in greater control of his body, more independent, better able to concentrate and even an earlier talker than babies who did not get early conversation.

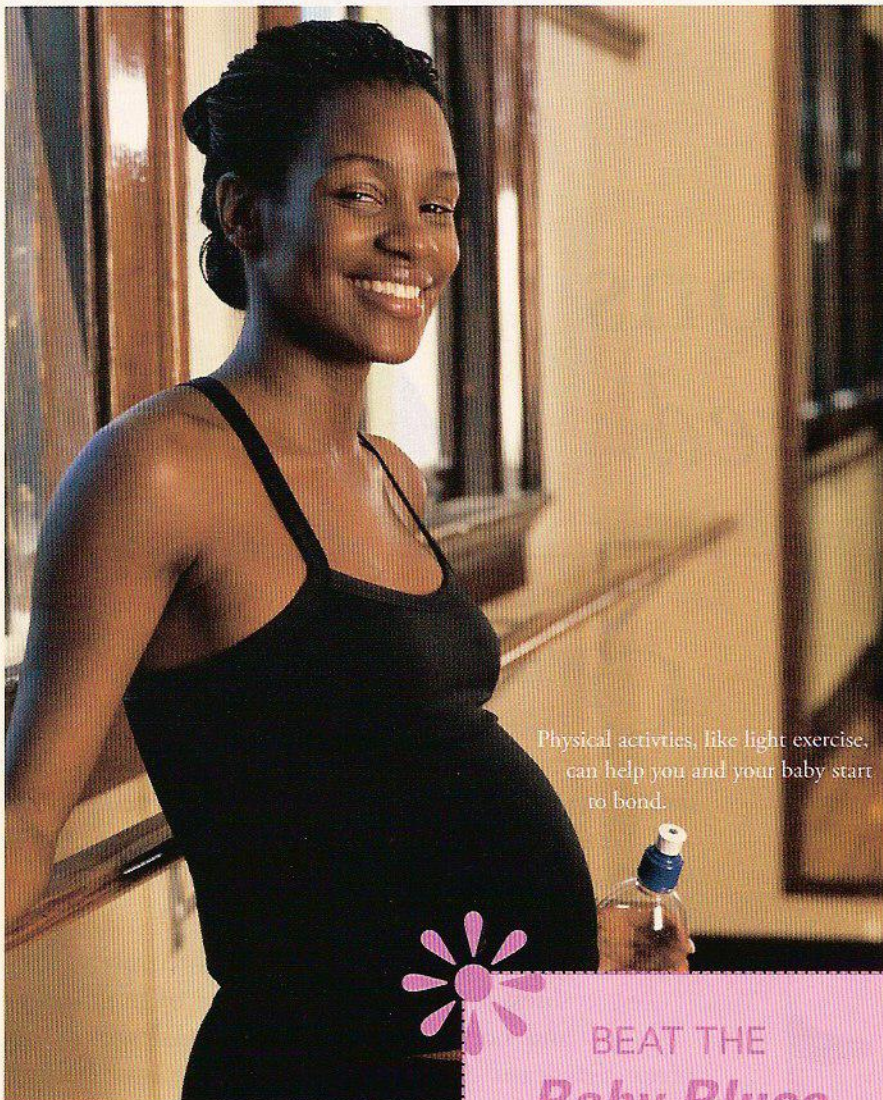
Let the Music Play. Studies have proven that music played within six minutes of delivery calmed newborn babies, who recognized the music. Because music is a series of sounds, it stimulates and trains newborns to listen, which in turn develop your child's language skills.

Read Me a Story. Go beyond just a few kind words to baby by reading nursery rhymes and children's books, which provide an exciting array of vocal experiences for baby to listen to as your voice rises and falls with inflection. Often, the same stories you

read to your baby prenatally are books that soothe and calm baby postnatally.

Say "Ohm." Studies suggest your stress can directly affect your baby, potentially resulting in low birth weight, premature birth and more-anxious-than-usual infants and toddlers. Make time to relax with your baby for a few minutes each day, imagining a circle of light connecting the two of you to each other, or simply breathe quietly in and out. >

{ note } Take time during pregnancy to bond with your partner, too. Remember, you'll never have this much one-on-one time again.



Physical activities, like light exercise, can help you and your baby start to bond.



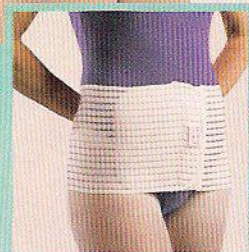
BEAT THE Baby Blues

Be in the Know. Read a book to learn what's happening with your baby in the womb, so you know and can celebrate when he reaches a milestone. Play him your favorite CD when his hearing develops, or treat him – and yourself – to a chocolate shake when he gets his sense of taste.

Work It Out. Light exercise can actually become a soothing time for baby and mommy. Not only is exercise good for you and baby physically, but walking, swimming and light dancing while pregnant also provides a gentle rocking motion for baby, where she feels secure and calm, and more connected to mommy. Yoga teaches relaxing and calming breathing techniques and movements that keep you and baby stress-free – and makes for happy babies. ♪

Even if you've always wanted to be a mom, pregnancy can be a rough time. All-day morning sickness, non-stop fatigue and other pregnancy stresses can make, especially in the first trimester, challenging. You may start to feel guilty, as though your sickness is a sign that you're not going to be a good mother. Let those feelings go. **It's totally normal** to wonder whether you're really ready to be a mom and even to feel ambivalent about your pregnancy. It doesn't mean you don't want your baby. ✨

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