



Development of the Foetal Senses

Touch





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Welcome to this Foetal Senses resource, shared through the Butterfly Baby Club, which focuses on... the development of touch in the womb. The resource is divided into two parts. The first part explores how babies develop and use their sense of touch, and the second part describes a sense-based mindfulness activity that expectant parents can share with their unborn babies.

Let's begin by exploring how babies develop their sense of touch in the womb...

The development of a baby's sense of touch is often overlooked during pregnancy. Already at eight weeks gestation, babies are developing touch receptors in their face and responding to touch around their lips and cheeks. Progressively, touch receptors will start forming in their feet and hands. In week 11, evidence shows that babies start using their mouth, hands and feet to explore their surroundings and their own bodies. Ultrasound scans have shown babies touching parts of their body and even holding on to the umbilical cord. By week 17, touch receptors continue to develop in the abdomen and, incredibly, by week 32 babies can feel the movement of a single hair on their body!

Let's not forget that out of all the senses, touch is the earliest to develop. So even before babies can smell, taste, see or hear, they can feel their womb environment. Research has shown that babies use touch to interact with their surroundings and that it also helps them to self-regulate, self-soothe and feel consoled by their caregivers.

Touch continued...



The foetal position, with hands and legs tucked into midline, helps babies to stay calm and regulated before birth and afterwards.

By 30 weeks gestation, most of the neural pathways in the somatosensory system, which relates to touch, have developed. By now, babies can sense cold, heat, pressure and pain in all parts of their body.

Touch is also another sense which nurtures the parent-baby attachment bond and promotes wellbeing.

Now it's time to share a sense-based activity with your baby...

This mindfulness session will require you to pamper yourself and your baby by having a relaxing bath or shower, followed by a gentle massage. This activity is designed to help you connect with your baby whilst focusing on the sense of touch.

Once you are ready to begin, place one or both hands on your belly to reaffirm your physical connection with your baby before stepping into the bath or shower. You may want to place one hand on your belly during the session, when it is practical to do so, to maintain the connection with your baby during your sensory experience.

Take a few mindful breaths, in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Don't rush, take your time to get used to this circular breathing.

Touch continued...



Spend a moment just enjoying the warmth of the water on your skin. Notice how the water feels as it touches your skin and moves around your belly. Imagine how the change in temperature and sensation of the water on your body may feel to your baby as they bathe in the amniotic fluid of the womb. Whatever you are thinking or feeling, describe this to your baby either by speaking out loud or sharing your thoughts quietly with them. Take time to relax and enjoy quality time with your baby as you bathe together.

Once you are ready to step out of the bath or shower, let's move on the next stage of your parent-baby pamper session... the massage.

It's important to use a moisturising lotion or oil during massage to protect your skin and allow your hands to glide. Begin by gently placing some lotion or oil on your belly and noticing how that feels. Is it warm, cold or just right? Tell your baby how it feels. Begin to gently smooth the lotion or oil over your abdomen in slow, rhythmic strokes. Describe to your baby what you are doing and how it feels to you. Imagine how it may feel to your little one as they sense the gentle pressure of your hands gliding over the womb and feel the sensation of the strokes on their own skin. Although it may seem like there aren't many options when it comes to stroking your belly, it's all a matter of being creative! You could stroke in a clockwise direction, then switch it up to counterclockwise or change the rhythm. Hold your baby in mind as you massage your belly.

As you move on to massage the rest of your body, describe to your baby which part of your body you are touching, how it looks and the way it moves. For example, you can describe to your baby what you look like as you massage your face and what you imagine they may look like, or count the number of your fingers and toes and describe how they can wiggle. 3

Touch continued...



Perhaps even tell your baby how you look forward to treating them to a massage once they are born.

Enjoy pampering yourself and your baby.

Once your massage is finished, take a few long deep breaths and enjoy just 'being' with your baby as you both benefit from the 'feel good' hormones that will have been released during your pamper session.

That brings us to the end of this sensory activity and Foetal Senses resource series. We hope that the mindfulness session has been a relaxing and enjoyable experience for you and your baby. We also hope you that you have found the resources useful and have learned something new about the development of your baby's senses.

You may like to explore the baby massage resources in the Quiet Space of the Butterfly Baby Club and enjoy pampering your little one once they are born.