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## **Maximizing Brain Development in Early Childhood**

The first few years of a child's life are more than just cute giggles and messy meals. They are a crucial time for brain development. Ninety percent of brain development occurs by age three. During this time of rapid growth, millions of connections are forming in a child's brain. Healthy brain development in young children is rooted in their experiences. Adults can positively impact a child's brain development by providing a safe, stable, and nurturing environment.

Here are some important ways to help a baby's brain develop:

- Pregnant mothers should eat nutritious foods, avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, and have prenatal checkups. Brain development begins very soon after conception.
- Create a safe and secure environment. When a baby feels safe and their caregiver responds to them, they live in low stress conditions that aid in healthy brain development.
- Respond consistently and lovingly to a baby's cries.
- Talk to your baby and copy the sounds they make. Face-to-face interaction builds the brain connections for language development and healthy emotional bonding.
- Read to your baby beginning at birth. Hearing someone read helps develop language connections. Reading also provides a regular opportunity for bonding and positive interactions.
- If you utilize childcare, select a high-quality provider who will interact with your baby lovingly and provide a safe, clean, and secure environment.

For more guidance on nurturing healthy brain development check out the most recent K-State Research and Extension Living Well webinar recording, titled: "Rapid Development of Baby Brains and Why It Matters" at <https://bit.ly/ksrebabybrains>.

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