

A baby with dark hair and eyes is shown from the chest up, wearing a white onesie with a pattern of small black and yellow squares. The baby is holding a colorful toy with black and white wavy patterns and a pink and yellow section. The background is a bright yellow wall with a subtle pattern. The title 'play smart' is written in large, colorful letters (red, blue, pink, green) in the upper right corner.

# play smart

There's no magical toy that will turn your tot into a genius. But you can pick playthings that boost your baby's development at every stage.

BY MEGAN MATTES

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEXANDRA GRABLEWSKI

A red circular graphic with a halftone dot pattern, containing the text '0-3 MONTHS' in white.

0-3  
MONTHS

## Eat, sleep, poop, and repeat!

True, that's how your newborn spends most of his day. But he's also getting acquainted with his surroundings through touch, hearing, and smell. "Add a few simple, washable toys in with activities like singing and rocking to help develop his senses," says Stevanne Auerbach, Ph.D., author of *Dr. Toy's Smart Play Smart Toys*.

### BEST BETS

■ **UNBREAKABLE MIRROR** Since your baby can't move much, he's exploring the world around him with his eyes, even though his vision is still blurry. He's also developing a sense of self, which makes staring at faces especially interesting. Hold a toy mirror, and make silly faces, blow raspberries, or move around in it to engage him.

■ **HIGH-CONTRAST PLAYTHINGS** Toys in contrasting colors not only provide visual stimulation, they also improve motor skills by encouraging kicking, wiggling, and arm waving as your baby reaches for the vibrant object. Pick playthings that combine black-and-white patterns (such as stripes and polka dots) with bright colors.

■ **SOFT TOYS** Plush dolls and rattles that have varied textures, crinkling fabric, vivid colors, and squeakers can provide a stimulating multisensory experience for your little one.

Wimmer Ferguson  
Mind-Shapes, \$22;  
[manhattantoy.com](http://manhattantoy.com)

3-6  
MONTHS

## Everything looks like a toy to your baby.


As your child's vision improves, she can focus accurately and track objects with her eyes. She's also learning to sit up and can purposefully grasp for things, which means she will want to touch (and taste) everything. Don't be surprised if she becomes vocal now when she plays.

### BEST BETS

■ **PLAYMAT** Tummy time is crucial to strengthening your baby's muscles. Go with a playmat that has plenty of toys hanging overhead to tempt her to lift her neck, reach her arms up, and work on her hand-eye coordination. It should also include a mirror, different fabrics, and rattles or squeakers to keep her active.

■ **SOFT BOOKS** Your baby is becoming fascinated with language, so there's no better time to introduce soft books, which are easier for little hands to grasp. Look for ones with bright colors, varied textures, and liftable

flaps. "Make sure you turn storytime into an interactive experience," says Jennifer Fogo, Ph.D., a pediatric occupational therapist at the University of Indianapolis, in Indiana. Point out pictures and repeat names ("Dog," "Baby.") to help develop motor and early language skills as well as boost social interaction.



Lil' Lion's Happy Hangout Activity Gym from Infantino, \$35; [target.com](http://target.com)