

Baby's First Christmas - Top Tips

By Dr. Lin Day (www.babysensory.com)

Christmas is a special time of the year for parents and an even more magical one for babies. The Christmas tree, presents, shiny decorations, colourful lights, smells, tastes and sounds make Christmas Day a complete sensory delight. Unfortunately, the celebrations can be both exhausting and stressful, so it is important to keep in mind that your baby still needs your love and warmth and the security of a familiar routine. It is also worth considering the safety aspects of anything that can be harmful to your baby.



Here are ten top tips to ensure that your baby enjoys the celebrations:

Cuddles

Christmas provides the perfect excuse for relatives and friends to get together to enjoy the celebrations. To ensure that your baby does not become too overwhelmed from the excitement, limit guests to family and close friends. If they want to hold or play with your baby, keep the changeovers to a minimum and make sure you are available for a cuddle when needed. Nothing is more important to your baby's emotional well-being than your reassuring presence.

Routine

Make your baby's first Christmas as enjoyable as possible by keeping his or her routine the same. Too much change can raise your baby's stress levels. To avoid emotional insecurity, give presents when your baby is alert and ready to play and stick to the normal schedule for eating and sleeping. If you are nursing your baby, find a quiet place away from the action. Both of you will appreciate the chance to relax and spend some peaceful time together.

Comforter

Christmas Day provides a wealth of sensory stimulation for your baby, but look out for signs of over stimulation and tiredness. Too much excitement can make your baby grumpy or miserable. A favourite blanket or toy can provide the emotional comfort and security that your baby needs, but stay close by to provide a reassuring touch.

Toys

Age and stage appropriate toys will stimulate your baby's senses, offer a wealth of learning opportunities and lead development forwards. Black and white objects bright, colourful toys and mobiles that make soft, gentle sounds will stimulate the interest of a newborn or very young baby. Favourite toys for babies aged three to six months include objects that can be brought to the mouth and play gyms that can be

biffed and kicked. From six to nine months of age, pop-up toys, musical instruments, tea sets and activity centres with buttons to press will provide an endless source of amusement. Large plastic bricks, wooden puzzles with handles, shape sorters, drums and push along toys are fun and educational for babies aged nine to twelve months. However, giving your baby too many toys on Christmas Day can be overwhelming. Limit the number of toys to one or two at any one time to maintain interest. If your baby becomes irritable, change the activity.

Books

Books are one of the best toys for babies and it is never too early to introduce them. Books that contain textured or sparkly materials, large, brightly coloured pictures and hide-and-seek surprises encourage interaction with a familiar adult, and make great Christmas presents. Snuggling up close and talking about the pictures is a wonderful way to introduce new words and sounds. For relatives or friends who find it difficult to know what to say to your baby, reading a story makes talking much easier.

Creative presents

Creative presents can brighten up your baby's first Christmas. A treasure basket containing interesting objects or a cardboard box filled with paper or fabric offers endless learning possibilities. However, safety is an important consideration. Christmas tags with sharp edges, long ribbons and homemade creations that contain small parts can present a serious hazard. Never give plastic wrap and Styrofoam products to your baby. If swallowed, they may adhere to the lining of the gut causing blockage and infection. Toys designed for older children such as electronic games and singing Christmas cards may contain batteries or magnets, which if ingested, can adhere to internal tissues and leak dangerous chemicals. Always err on the side of safety and discard the toy.

Games

Play with relatives and friends can be very enriching for your baby on Christmas Day. For example, they can show your baby how a new toy works, or get involved in turn-taking activities such as rolling a ball back and forth. Time-honoured games such as peek-a-boo, blowing 'raspberries' and being tickled with a soft brush are lovely ways to stimulate smiles and giggles. Adult interaction is vital for healthy social and emotional development because it spells love and warmth, and because it shows your baby that he or she is fun to be with. However, your baby will also need time to explore on his or her own terms. A balance of quality adult interactions and baby-driven play are a time-tested way of ensuring that your baby makes discoveries and solves problems.

Smells

Pine needles, scented potpourri, cinnamon, spices, herbs and Christmas cooking smells offer your baby a multi-sensory experience and may be associated with fond memories in years to come. Good smells can enhance your baby's mood and behaviour, but it will be trial and error finding out which ones appeal the most. Your baby's facial expressions should indicate whether one odour is preferred to another. Avoid essential oils, since these may contain a high phenol content, which can irritate your baby's skin. Other scents that can cause an allergic reaction include Arum lilies, mustard and horseradish.

Decorations

Babies are very attracted to coloured lights, shiny decorations, tinsel and glitter. All these things will stimulate your baby's senses and accelerate learning. However, safety is all-important. Putting presents under the Christmas tree provides a tactile experience for your baby, but place gifts of perfume and aftershave out of reach. They may contain chemicals that could be harmful if swallowed. Your baby will love the shiny decorations, but make sure that they are shatterproof and do not present a choking hazard. Avoid using mistletoe or holly as decorations. Ingested berries can cause severe vomiting, diarrhoea and drowsiness. Use low voltage LED tree lights that meet the safety standards or better still, use battery-operated fairy lights, which do not get hot. The best option is to pick your baby up and look at the Christmas tree together from a safe distance. This will help your baby to feel a part of what is going on.

At the end of a busy day

Christmas carols, songs and music bring warmth and happiness to Christmas Day and they set the tone for a relaxed and inviting atmosphere. Music is one of most beneficial learning resources for your baby and its effect on intellectual development is far-reaching. Music can also help your baby to relax and drift into peaceful sleep at the end of a busy day. There is nothing more important to your baby than snuggling up in your arms and hearing you sing a favourite lullaby. This is the best way to ensure the end of a wonderful Christmas.