



What can my baby learn in water?

Gosh! There's just so much for your baby to learn in the pool.

The aquatic classroom makes a wonderful adventure land for your baby, there are so many things for him to discover about himself and about his world as he plays and "swims" around in the water.

Building muscle and brain power.

He'll be developing and strengthening neural pathways, back and forth from brain to muscles and joints and back again as he moves his little body in the water. He'll learn about weight as he experiences the difference between buoyancy and gravity. His mind will be working overtime as he learns about time and space. How far is this? How near is that? How big am I? How small am I? He'll learn to make decisions such as how long will this take me; will I fit; should I try this again? Developing an understanding of these concepts is vital for his understanding of school subjects such as Maths and English.

Learning to swim builds fantastic confidence.

With care and encouragement he'll learn to trust, in turn this trust builds the confidence to explore new things, all of which help to foster intelligence.

How long will it take before my baby can swim?

Your baby isn't going to swim off into the sunset just yet!

A baby's motor development in the water is the same as that on land. So while we can start patterning swimming movements and building strength and development there will be skills your baby won't be ready to master. Young babies have a proportionately larger head and shorter arms and legs. This makes it difficult for them to lift their head to breathe or move their arms and legs well enough to propel themselves through the water efficiently.

Should I wait until my baby is older?

Babies who start in the water at a younger age usually avoid developing a fear of water, which is so often seen in children who start lessons at an older age. Learning to swim does take time; early beginners usually have a greater awareness of the properties of water and generally reach a higher level of aquatic skill at an earlier age than their later starting counterparts. This means a 2 ½ year old who started at 6 months of age might be able to propel themselves safely back to the edge, whereas a child starting at 2 ½ years might take six to twelve months to reach the same level of skill (depending on issues such as the child's temperament, confidence, coordination and time spent in the water).

Respect the difference.

Each baby is different. Most babies love coming along to baby swim, but there are others who don't enjoy the experience. It's important to be attuned to your baby's needs. Some babies will feel shy about being in a new situation, others will dive right in without a care in the world. If your baby seems unsure then offer lots of cuddles, encouragement and support. If your baby is just raring to go, loosen your hold, allow some freedom to move and encourage him to explore and learn about his own capabilities. There may be days when your baby might like to finish early, that's fine, in the larger scheme of things hopping out when your baby has had enough won't make a great deal of difference to his learning and it will help foster his enjoyment of the water.

Two stages of learn to swim

Stage 1 (Around 3 ½ years or under)

Your baby will learn to love the water. He will become very confident and competent at basic skills such as submerging and learning to turn and kick back to the edge. He will develop sound foundation skills such as moving through the water with a horizontal body position and he will develop great breath control...Just watch how long he can swim around with his face in!

Stage 2 (Around 3 ½ years or over)

Your child will begin to learn the more complex swimming skills. Now that he has longer limbs and his head is more in proportion to his trunk he will find it easier to learn the more traditional swimming strokes than when he was a baby. With lots of time in the water and skill repetition he will become the little swimmer you always knew he'd be!

Note: Ages are approximate; some children will master skills earlier or later than others. It's important to respect each child's uniqueness and allow them the time they need to feel comfortable and confident in the water.

Extract from Barbara Nolan ASTCA journal.