

# Info-sheet Active States

## Active States

Active states are generally associated with term babies, for preterm babies active states can be less clear or well recognised and if they are awake with their eyes open they may have a glazed or strained expression. As babies become older they spend more time in alert and interactive states as they learn from and interact with the environment.

### Quiet Alert

Babies spend more time in quiet alert states as they mature. Initially they will be awake for short periods of time. During quiet alert periods watch how your baby responds to you if they turn their head towards you or look at you they want to interact. If your baby turns away, closes their eyes, pokes their tongue out, sneezes, hiccoughs or yawns they are overwhelmed and asking you to ease off a little.

Body movements/activity	Minimal
Eye Movements	Eyes brighten and widen
Facial Movements	Attentive (interested) appearance
Breathing Pattern	Regular
Level of response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Babies are interested in the environment in this state</li> <li>• They will focus on any stimulation presented</li> </ul>
<b>What this means for caregiving</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For term well babies immediately after birth they may have a period of intense alertness before sleeping for a long period.</li> <li>• As babies become older they spend more time in this state.</li> <li>• Providing something for your baby to see, hear or suck can help to keep them in a quiet alert state or help them move to this state from a drowsy or active alert state.</li> <li>• Babies in this state can respond to smile or look at their parent</li> <li>• This state is consider a good time to attempt to feed your baby</li> </ul>	

## Active Alert

The active alert state is also known as fussing. In this state preterm baby's may move their arms, legs or body a lot with their eyes closed and it can be difficult to tell if they are awake or asleep. Term baby's in a fussy state will also have lots of movements of their bodies, make sounds and their eyes may be open. Fussy behaviour with or without sounds tells you that your baby needs something to change or stop.

<b>Body movements/activity</b>	Variable activity level with startles and body movements
<b>Eye Movements</b>	Eyes open (term baby), or closed (preterm baby), dull/glazed (term and preterm) appearance
<b>Facial Movements</b>	May have some facial movements. Often none with a still face
<b>Breathing Pattern</b>	Irregular
<b>Level of response</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Babies react to sensory stimuli (i.e. noise) however their responses are generally delayed</li> <li>• With stimulation the baby may move to either a quiet alert or crying state</li> </ul>
<b>What this means for caregiving</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Babies in this state becoming sensitive to stimuli that disturbs them (i.e. hunger, tiredness, noise, excessive handling).</li> <li>• They may become more active and move to a crying state</li> <li>• Tiredness or caregiver interventions can interrupt this state allowing the baby to return to either a drowsy or sleep state</li> <li>• Attempting to feed an infant at this time will often be unsuccessful, you will need to calm your baby by wrapping, cuddling or using a dummy before offering a feed</li> </ul>	

## Supporting Active States

- During an active alert state look for things to show your baby to help them explore the environment. Initially after birth your face is the most important thing for your baby to see. Talk to your baby making faces to keep their interest, as they grow they will copy your expressions and face movements.
- As they become older quiet alert states are a good time to read to your baby and show them things.
- If your baby is fussing using your voice can help to calm them, if they continue to fuss and squirm check to see if they are uncomfortable, need a nappy change, are hungry or need a cuddle

Information in this information sheet has been modified from the following sources:

- Blackburn, S., & Blakewell-Sachs (2003). Understanding the Behavior of Term Infants. White Plains, NY: March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation, and [https://www.marchofdimes.com/nursing/index.bm2?cid=00000003&spid=ne\\_s1\\_1&tpi](https://www.marchofdimes.com/nursing/index.bm2?cid=00000003&spid=ne_s1_1&tpi)
- Caring for your baby in the Neonatal Unit: A parents handbook (2014) Inga Warren and Cherry Bond