

PLAY WITH ME, MOMMY!

How Can You Keep a Child Entertained When You're Confined to Your Bed? One Mother Came Up With 24 Ways!

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"Now, I want you to go home and put your feet up--and stay that way until your next appointment." These simple words spoken by my obstetrician put me in a state of panic. I knew that for the sake of [the babies] I was carrying, I would have to follow my doctor's orders. But what about my three-year-old? Was it humanly possible to follow this "off your feet" advice while trying to take care of his needs as well? How can a mother doomed to confinement in bed ensure that her child is kept busy and entertained (and happy)?

I came up with some solutions, and I guarantee that the following activities will help. They are all devised to expend the least amount of the resting mother's energy while burning up the maximum amount of the child's energy--both mental and physical. Most important, they can all be done while Mom remains in bed. The child does all the fetching/chasing or other legwork involved.

First Things First

- If you don't have some of the supplies listed, simply improvise with things you already have around the house--or have someone make a quick trip to the toy store or library to pick them up for you. Husbands can become handy supply gatherers (or "gofers") for this temporary "nest."
- Store all of these supplies in a large laundry basket or two near your bed for easy access.
- Have someone daily pack in a cooler all the food/snacks/drinks you and your child will need for the day and leave it beside your bed (along with disposable paper plates, cups, etc., and a large sealable plastic bag for garbage).
- Keep near your bed a roll of paper towels (for spills), a box of tissues, a note pad and pencil (to jot down things to do for your supply gatherer/helpmate), and a telephone and directory.
- Using an old sheet or blanket as a playtime cover could spare your bedspread the marks of the day's activities.
- If your youngster needs help with toileting (such as unsnapping/unhooking, pulling down/up pants, etc.), do all adjusting from your bed. Tell him he is playing "Penguin" as he hobbles to the bathroom with pants to his knees.
- Keep the activities brief so that the child will not become bored. End them while the child is still "hot" on the game, ensuring its success in the next day or two.
- Begin with the more active games. End with the quieter games for a gentle wind-down period.
- Have a remote-controlled television placed in your room, if possible, and don't hesitate to structure the day's activities around your child's favorite TV shows. Watch her favorite show with her, or take a short mental break yourself and dive into your favorite book or magazine while she watches TV beside you.
- Finally, and most important, don't feel guilty that you might be "neglecting" your child's usual needs or disturbing his normal routine. You may find that you're giving her more "quality time" than you ever have before. In addition, when your confinement has long ended, you may be surprised to find your youngster one day dragging you into your bedroom and saying, "Lie down for a while, Mommy. You need a rest . . . and we can play."

Active Games

1. With your hands, bat a balloon back and forth between the two of you. Let your child do all the

chasing and fetching for any wayward tosses.

2. Let your child scramble under the covers of your bed while you pretend you don't know what that unusual lump could be. After about ten wrong guesses, state that what you *really* need is a wonderful child to hug. That is the cue for your little one to pop out. Hug each other and repeat the game--this time with new and wilder guesses as to what that little lump could be.

3. Play "Bed Bowling." At the foot of your bed, have your child line up rows and stacks (if he's coordinated enough) of small paper cups. Using a small ball, let him bowl the cups down. Keep track of his best score.

4. Play "Bedsread Traffic." Since most blankets or bedsreads have some pattern in them, use small matchbox cars or trucks to travel along the "roadways." Make up stories about where you are going, what you are doing. Even stage a crash when you both take the same narrow roadway.

5. Play "Bed Basketball." Toss rolled-up socks or foam balls into an empty laundry basket at the foot of your bed. A variation: Have your child open a dresser drawer halfway, and together, try to toss the socks in.

6. Using a hand mirror, make comical faces. Next, name off the following feelings one by one and tell your child to show those feelings on his face while looking into the mirror: happy, sad, angry, funny, scared, bored, confused, hurt, sleepy, sick, worried, silly, shy, brave, embarrassed, excited. Then describe brief situations, and tell your child to express the feeling on his face. Examples: "Your friend doesn't feel like playing with you. Show me your face"; or "You just opened a birthday present and it's exactly what you wanted. Show me your face"; or "You just banged your toe": or "Someone asks you to do a hard puzzle."

7. Dim the lights in the room, and with a flashlight, make hand shadows on the wall or ceiling. If you can, have someone pick up a copy of the book *Hand Shadows to Be Thrown Upon a Wall: A Series of Novel and Amusing Figures Formed by the Hand* by Henry Bursill (Dover Publications, 1967). See what kinds of shadows your youngster's body throws against the wall.

8. Keep a set of building blocks in a shallow pan or a dishwashing bucket. Use another empty pan or bucket for the child to build a creation in.

9. Play "Day at the Beach" in bed. All you need is a plastic pail with a shovel and a box of tissues or an old catalog. First make the "sand" by wadding up, one by one, dozens of tissue or pages. After you have a substantial pile (the more the merrier!), it's time for your little one to bury you. Then make a "sand" castle with walls and moats lining the edges of your bed. When "beach time" play is over, store the paper in a large plastic bag for the next day's use.

10. Active board games, such as Hungry Hungry Hippos and Ants in the Pants, are fun and exciting and burn up lots of energy in little ones.

11. Play "Bed Fishing." On each of 26 slips of paper, which you can cut into the shape of a simple fish, write one letter of the alphabet, followed by an object/word starting with that letter. Example: "A-Alligator," "B-Bake." Put a paper clip on each fish. Next, tie a magnet to one end of a string, and tie a ruler or long stick to the other end. Place the paper-clipped fish in a box or bag, and have your child set it on the floor. Now it's time to go fishing. As your child catches each fish, say the letter and the word aloud. Then have her act out each word.

12. Play "Red Light/Green Light." Have your child stand on one side of the room and the "starting point." When you cover your eyes and shout "Green Light," he can proceed toward the opposite side of the room. Explain that at any second you will yell "Red Light," and then rapidly uncover your eyes. At "Red Light" he must stop instantly, for if you see him move his body in any way, he must go back to the starting point. He wins when he reaches an agreed-upon spot on the other side of the room.

Quiet Games

13. Pull cardboard inserts out of the magazines you have. (Have your youngster round up magazines for you.) Using safety scissors, your child can practice cutting them into interesting shapes. (Again, cutting into a pan or wide shallow bucket will help keep the mess to a minimum.)
14. Using a "magnetic page"-type photo album, construct your own alphabet book. Go through old magazines and catalogs, and cut out pictures of objects. A picture of a vase will go on your "V" page. A picture of a duck will go on the "D" page. Each page of the album will serve as a letter of the alphabet. You can cut the letters out, too, from large headlines, or draw each letter on small pieces of paper, and slip them into the pages with the pictures. The project can be delved into every day or so for short periods--as long as attention lasts--until your masterpiece is finally complete. Even an older, reading child will enjoy the challenge of hunting for words with hard-to-find letters (a queen? a zebra?) while making this priceless book.
15. Every five days or so, have your "gofer" check out a stack of children's books from the library. New books refresh your reading and confinement time and will entertain you both. Your helper might even enlist the aid of your local children's librarian. When she knows of your predicament, she may be willing to help by setting aside books you haven't read yet.
16. Color with your child. Grab a couple of coloring books or some paper, invest in a large box of crayons, and color--and imagine--away. If you want, keep a roll of tape handy to have the child display completed pictures.
17. If you don't have a handy supply of easy preschool puzzles, now is the time to start your collection. Have your helper buy a few, and borrow some. (Some libraries lend them out.)
18. Candy Land, Candy Land Bingo, memory card matching games, and Chutes and Ladders are ideal games for preschool (and older) children, and all have a calming effect.
19. Purchase (or borrow) Colorforms sets. Toddlers and school-age children delight in these bright sticker play sets. Together you can make up stories as you create exciting new scenes.
20. Play "I'm Thinking of an Animal." Describe an animal in great detail. See if your child can name it. Take turns being the one who guesses the animals. Make it a rule that the listener is completely finished and then says, "What am I?"
21. Play "I See Something [color]." Spot something silently in the room and then state, "I see something [green, for example]." Have your child try to guess what the object is. She gets five guesses. Take turns. Teach her to be sneaky--not to stare at the object, giving it away.
22. Keep handy a pan or another wide, flat surface and containers of fresh Play-Doh. It's amazing how many hours can fly by while the two of you create simple objects or animals. Favorite ones can be left out overnight to harden. Remember to seal any remaining Play-Doh in the can to prevent its drying out.
23. Play "What Is the Opposite?" Name a word and have your child state its opposite. Take turns being the opposite-namer. In addition to the standard ones, such as high/low and good/bad, you can bring up ones like hungry/full and empty/full, hard/soft and hard/easy. Encourage your child to come up with creative, even silly opposites. Example: frizzy hair/straight hair; wiggly, barking dog/calm, quiet dog.
24. Trace letters, numbers, or shapes one by one on your child's bare back. Have him guess what you "wrote." For the younger child trace a line going horizontal or vertical, and have him say whether you wrote "up and down" or "back and forth." Or slowly rub parts of his body and have him name those parts as you go. This is a guaranteed relaxer, perfect before naps or bedtime.