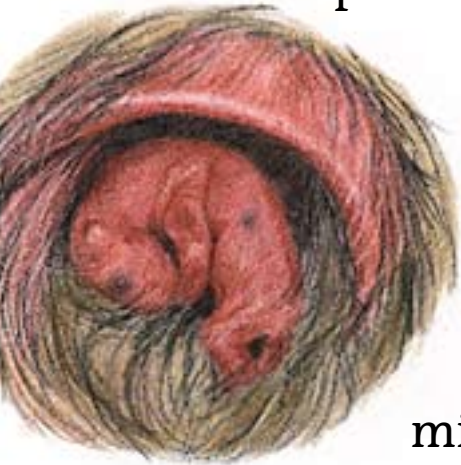


Koala Joey

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Far away in Australia, a koala sits high in a eucalyptus tree. She grips a branch with the rough pads and sharp claws on her paws. In her pouch she hides something special—her baby.



At birth the baby koala, called a joey, does not look like his furry mom. He is pink and bald and as small as a jellybean. Although he cannot see, he moves his legs and crawls. He smells milk and, without any help, starts to feel his way to his mother's pouch. Five minutes later he slips inside.

A koala's pouch opens from the bottom. After the joey climbs in, the mother koala tightens her pouch muscles. Now her joey cannot fall out.



Inside the pouch, the joey drinks his mother's milk and grows. His eyes open. His ears form, and he hears his mother's calls. Soon thick fur covers his body. By the time the joey is ready to explore the world, he looks like his mother.

At five months old, the joey peers out of his pouch. He eats a special soft food from his mother called pap. When the joey eats pap, he gets bacteria from his mother's stomach in his tummy too. He will need the bacteria to eat eucalyptus leaves, like grownup koalas do.



In another month, the joey leaves the pouch for the first time. He clings to his mother's belly while she climbs in the treetops. By the time he is eight months old, the joey no longer fits in his mother's pouch. But he still drinks her milk. A nipple sticks out of the pouch, and the joey sucks.



Now, for a few hours each night, the joey climbs on his mother's back for a ride. While riding piggyback, he reaches for eucalyptus leaves. Just like mom, he nips off leaves and chews them. The leaves have plenty of water in them, so koalas rarely go to the ground for a drink. But the leaves don't give koalas much energy, so most of the time, mother and joey curl together in the fork of a tree and sleep.



When the joey is about one year old, his piggyback days are over. Now he climbs to the treetops by himself. On each of his front paws, he has two thumbs opposite his three fingers. He can grip branches and grab leaves.

The young koala spends more and more time away from his mother. He no longer drinks her milk. He dozes alone on tree branches. Soon he will move to another tree and live on his own.

