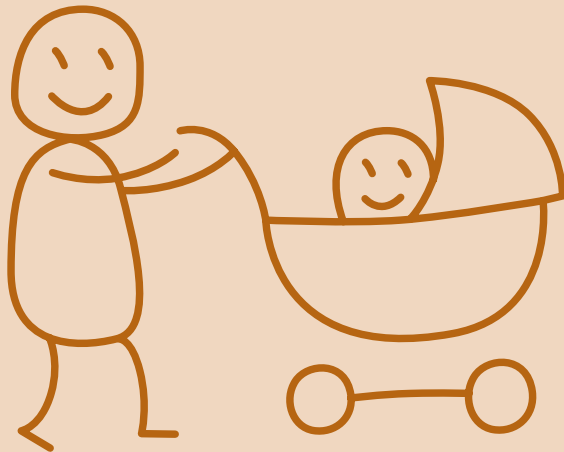


# child development 0–3 months



Coming into the world is a very big and scary adventure for babies. At first they don't know that you are there to comfort, feed and care for them. They can feel comfortable or uncomfortable, but they don't know that this is because they are full, safe, afraid, or hungry. They quickly learn to recognise the smell and voice of the person who feeds them and holds them most often (possibly the smell of their mother's milk) but they do not know this is their 'mother'. However, even from birth, they start to communicate with you and give you little signals when they are tired or hungry or awake and alert. They are learning all the time, and the job of parents is to help them to know that the world is a welcoming place for them to be in, where their needs will be met and they will learn to feel safe and loved. Remember that for a new baby everything is new and scary at first, even a nappy change.

## **Social and emotional development**

- Newborn babies cannot understand what is happening to them.
- They do not know that they are people.
- They do not know who helps when they cry.
- They feel happy when they feed, but they do not know what 'happy' is.
- They cry when they are hungry or need to sleep, but they do not know that they are being cared for.

The first and perhaps most important thing to understand about newborn babies is that they do not have any understanding of being a separate person inside their own skin, and certainly not a person in relationship with other people.

- Newborn babies do not cry 'for attention' or to 'get at' their parents.

A new baby in the first three months cannot decide to cry. They cry because of something that is happening inside them. They don't understand what is happening and they don't understand that you might be able to help them feel better.

They like the feelings they have when they feed successfully or hear your soothing voice or are cuddled, and they don't like feeling hungry or frightened - but they don't actually know that the feeling is caused by a full tummy or hunger.

- Because babies feel but are not yet able to think, they will pick up your feelings and be calm when you are calm, and unhappy if you are unhappy.

If you feel upset it will be impossible to hide it from your baby - she will think it's **her** feeling and respond as if it was! So, when you are tired and frazzled your baby may be hard to settle!

- Each baby is different, and each grows and develops in the way that is right for this baby.

Every baby is very different. You have heard that before but it is really true. Each baby has a different personality. They may be easygoing and placid, or shy and worried, or easily upset, and you will get to know this over the early months.

- The human face is the first and most important shape that babies learn, and the sounds of human voices are very important to them, even though they do not understand them.

Your baby is interested in you - especially in your voice and your face. Looking into someone's eyes is a necessity for 'falling in love' and forming a close and warm relationship. Show them your face and talk to them soothingly right from the start. Don't feel rejected if they sometimes turn away; tiny babies often get tired when they interact and need a rest.

- Babies need to feel safe, that someone is looking after them. They often begin to smile at a familiar face by around four to six weeks, and will look at you carefully from around the same time.

## Physical development

- Although babies are ready to exist and grow outside of their mother's womb, most parts of their bodies are still immature.

All new babies are very busy with their body. All brand new and never been used before – it takes the first three months to get the digestive system cranked up and running smoothly. You can tell by your baby's face that she is preoccupied a lot of the time with whatever is going on inside herself.

- Since babies do not understand anything about what is happening around them, they can become upset if they are given too much to see or do.

They can easily feel overwhelmed by sounds, colours, shapes and touch in the world outside the womb. Sometimes it's just too much! Loud noises will frighten most babies in their first months but they are soothed by crooning and the sound of gentle voices and sometimes even music they heard before they were born.

## Crying

- Many babies who are under three months old cry a lot, especially in the late afternoon or evening.
- This crying, often called colic, seems in part due to being overwhelmed by all that is happening inside their body as well as outside (their environment).

Note: 'Jiggling' babies is not a good way to help them settle and can be very scary or even painful for the baby, even if he stops crying. **It is important to never shake a baby.**

## Hearing and seeing

- Newborn babies can hear, and they have been hearing noises from well before they were born.
- Newborn babies have immature eye muscles, and while they can see, they can only clearly see things that are close by.

Newborns do not understand what they see. In the first three months they are attracted by faces, bright light, primary colours, stripes, dots and patterns. The human face is the first 'object' they recognise by learning that the shapes of eyes, nose and mouth form a face. Over the first three

months they begin to recognise particular faces and other things (like their teddy bear) in their world. Hanging pictures of faces and simple toys above their cot will give them practice at looking and learning.

## Using their bodies

- New babies move their bodies while they are awake, but they do not yet know how to make each part of their body move, or even that all the bits belong to them.

Infants in the first eight weeks have no control over their movements and all their physical activity is involuntary or reflex. Sucking, grasping (holding something tight in their hand), and startling ('jumping' when there is a loud noise or they are suddenly moved) are all reflexes. In their third month they will begin to watch their hands and feet wave in the air and also begin to wave their fist towards your face or some other desired object. They are beginning to get the idea that they have a body that moves, feels and has skin all round it, and that they have some influence over what it does!

- They start to work out how to lift their heads when lying on the tummy, and kick their legs by about eight weeks.

## Speech and language

- Babies show how they feel by what their face, voice and body does.
- For the newborn, crying is the main way your baby has to let you know something is wrong, and soon your baby may start having different cries for different things - hunger, pain, wet, cold, fear and loneliness.

- You will begin to recognise these different cries in the first few weeks. Babies have no understanding about time so all their needs are immediate and urgent.

It is important to respond to your tiny baby as quickly as you can so he begins to understand that you will be there for him when he calls out for you. This develops the feeling of security, which is very important.

- By seven or eight weeks babies will begin to discover their voice and make cooing noises and vowel sounds.
- Even by about eight weeks they will listen to what you say, then make noises back as they 'talk' to you.

## Activities for young babies

- make a face mobile and hang it, facing them, above their cot
- stroke different parts of their body to see how they like to be touched
- speak to them gently and use their name
- play them music
- sing to them
- hold them a lot
- let them look at your face as you talk to them
- copy their little gestures
- rock them gently
- lots of feeding and hopefully sleeping.



## Sleep

Most babies will still need to be waking for a feed once or twice during the night. Some sleep through the night, but this is unusual.

Some babies will resettle when you touch and soothe them, but mostly young babies need the feed.

## Summary

### **Social emotional:**

- watches parent's face when being talked to, average six weeks (range four to eight weeks)
- smiles by five to seven weeks
- by three months baby is gurgling and laughing aloud.

### **Talk with your doctor or child health nurse if:**

- you feel unable to meet your baby's needs most of the time
- you see your baby in a negative way (as difficult) or are disappointed with your child
- you do not feel able to respond to the baby
- your baby does not usually calm, at least momentarily, most of the time when picked up
- your baby has a high pitched cry
- your baby has no social smile by eight weeks.



## **Motor skills, vision and hearing:**

- when cheek touched, turns to same side to suckle (from birth)
- lifts head when prone (on tummy), average six weeks (four to eight weeks)
- kicks legs vigorously by two months
- arms, fingers and legs move freely
- follows a moving light with eyes for a couple of seconds by one month
- watches a moving face by two to three months
- eyes are lined up most of the time by six weeks.

## **Talk with your doctor or child health nurse if your baby:**

- is unusually 'floppy' or stiff
- has an arm and leg on one side stiffer, floppier, stronger or weaker than on the other. One side is moving more than the other
- has unusually 'good' head control (neck and back muscles stiff)
- always holds their fingers in a tight fist
- is not watching faces by two to three months
- is not startling to noise
- is not chuckling and smiling at three months.

## **Daily activities:**

- usually feeds well after a couple of weeks
- often has no clear day and night pattern of wakeful and sleep times.

## **Talk with your doctor or child health nurse if your baby:**

- is still having difficulties with feeding after a couple of weeks
- is crying for long times each day
- is hard to settle
- seems quite different to other babies (too tense, too calm).

## **Speech and language:**

- startled by loud sounds by one month
- makes sounds other than crying by two months
- begins listening to voices and making sounds when talked to by seven to eight weeks.

## **Talk with your doctor or child health nurse if your baby:**

- is not watching your face when being spoken to by two to three months
- seems not to react to sounds.

**Note:** Children are different and may develop at different rates. So if your child does not do all the things in this topic, it may be because your child is working on some different area of his learning and development at present. However, children usually follow the same pattern of development, and it is good to have reassurance that your child is developing normally in their own unique way.

If your child is very different from other children, if you are worried about your child's development or if it seems to go backwards, you should talk with a health professional about your concerns. If there is a problem, getting help and ideas early will help. Remember that what matters is to support them on moving forward from where they are now.

## For more information contact:

- Local community child health nurse  
See inside your baby's purple 'All About Me' book  
Look in the phone directory under 'Child Health Centres'  
Visit [www.healthywa.wa.gov.au](http://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au)
- Local family doctor
- Ngala Helpline  
8:00am–8:00pm 7 days a week  
Telephone (08) 9368 9368  
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 111 546\*  
[www.ngala.com.au](http://www.ngala.com.au)
- Parenting WA Line  
Freecall 1800 654 432\* (24 hour service)  
[www.dlgc.wa.gov.au/parents](http://www.dlgc.wa.gov.au/parents)
- Raising Children Network  
[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)
- Kidsafe WA  
8:30am–5:00pm (Monday to Friday)  
Telephone (08) 9340 8509  
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 802 244\*  
[www.kidsafewa.com.au](http://www.kidsafewa.com.au)
- SIDS & Kids  
9:00am–5:00pm (Monday to Friday)  
Telephone (08) 9474 3544  
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 199 466\*  
[www.sidsandkidswa.org](http://www.sidsandkidswa.org)

\*Calls made from a mobile may be charged at timed rate.

This topic may use 'he' and 'she' in turn - please change to suit your child's sex.

**This information, along with other child health information, is available in electronic format at [www.healthywa.wa.gov.au](http://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au)**

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability. Please contact [childcommunity@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:childcommunity@health.wa.gov.au)

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