

child development 3-6 months



Most parents find having a baby between three and six months old very enjoyable. Your baby will have come a long way in the first three months and many of the internal 'settling down' processes that newborns have will have been overcome. Three month old babies are usually very social beings who delight in being with you. And parents have usually learned enough of their baby's ways and messages to get their responses right for most of the time.

Social and emotional development

- By three or four months old your baby is beginning to get a bit of an idea about being in the world and you are getting to know each other.
- She will make eye contact with you and you will smile at each other. She will be able to 'read' some of your expressions and she will look worried if you look cross or worried.
- Your baby has learnt that you are the person (or one of the people) who meets her needs a lot of the time but she does not yet fully understand that you are a separate person.
- She still has an idea that the whole of life is happening inside herself and she is making all of it happen. The idea that you are completely separate from her, and can take yourself away from her, will not come until your baby is seven months or older.

When you understand what she wants and try to meet her needs, your baby feels that the world is safe and predictable and good things come from inside her as well as from you. Your baby is getting the idea that relationships are rewarding and also that she is valuable, and this is an important basis for her relationship with you and other people as well as her own self esteem.

- At this stage she is often happy to smile and engage with strangers because she is getting so much pleasure from smiling and engaging with you.
- You and your baby will be having ‘conversations’ with each other, and she will be getting excited at the feeling of you responding to her and kick her legs and wave her arms.
- She will still easily become over stimulated, so take care – when there is too much excitement your baby may start to cry and need to be calmed down.

At four months your baby:

- smiles lots
- laughs out loud and squeals with delight
- shows she enjoys life by laughing and kicking her legs
- likes people
- is interested in the surroundings and activities going on around her
- clearly shows enjoyment at being bathed, talked to, etc.

Physical development and motor skills

- Your baby is starting to get some control over his body – even starting to realise that it is actually his body.
- He will spend time looking carefully at his hands and touching and looking at his feet, getting the idea that it feels from the outside as well as the inside and it’s all attached.
- He will grasp at objects in front of him now and you will need to put stronger mobiles above his cot and pram/stroller.
- His body might be hard for him to control but it does interesting things when he can!



It is very important for your baby to spend time on his tummy on the floor kicking his legs and waving his arms as if he is about to swim off at any moment. This strengthens his back and helps him work up to crawling. He will get frustrated after a while with not being able to hold his head up for a long time or move forward – but give him as long as he can tolerate.

Note: Do not leave a baby on his tummy when he sleeps. Sleeping on the tummy increases the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

Put interesting things on the floor near him and stimulate his desire to move towards them when he is ready. He will take everything to his mouth – that's his way of exploring the shape and texture of objects. Rattles, plastic spoons and tea strainers – anything smooth, graspable, too large to swallow and preferably coloured will be a good object for him to discover the nature of matter.

Your baby:

- rolls over from front to back at about four to six months
- is able to lift head and chest when on his tummy by four months
- when on tummy will lift and wave his arms and legs about
- begins to discover hands belong to him and plays with fingers by about three to four months
- grabs and plays with his toes when lying on his back at about four to five months
- is able to hold objects for brief periods at three to four months
- brings toys and objects to mouth if put in his hand

- swipes at dangling objects at three to four months, but usually misses
- topples over if put in sitting position
- grabs for a toy such as a block or rattle at around five months
- is able to support own weight when stood on feet (don't do this too much, it does not mean he is ready to walk)
- when being held grabs at hair, spectacles and other objects like badges or chains
- sits up while being held by hands.

Hearing and seeing

Your baby is starting to understand the world around her and the incoming signals.

- Her eye muscles work well and she can follow you with her eyes, moving from one object to another and focussing on small objects.
- If she can she will check her perception by grasping and mouthing the object. 'Yes', she thinks, 'that's round and smooth and mum keeps saying the word 'spoon' – this "spoon" thing has existence in the world as an object in it's own right'.
- Her exploring is important, so give her time to look properly at objects and try to help her be comfortable so she can concentrate on them.
- Sounds as well as sights are becoming familiar and defined – your baby will recognise voices and turn her head towards them.



Speech and language

Your baby will now be making a whole range of sounds – indeed some that you are not able to make yourself and that might sound like a foreign language. This is because he is born with the potential to speak any language and we cultivate and discard particular sounds according to the language we speak.

He will be very interested in how your mouth works and how the sound comes out.

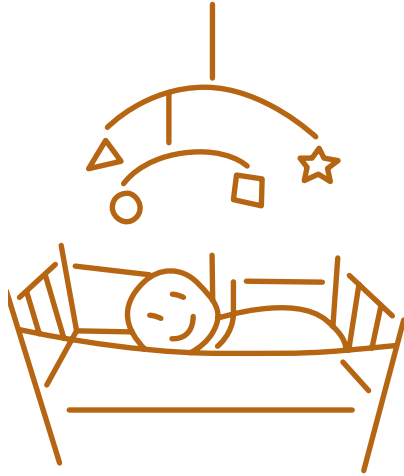
- Show him your tongue and practise simple sounds together – ‘maa, daa’ are good ones to begin with.
- When he makes a sound, repeat it to him so he knows what sound he has made. This also starts a conversation game between you.
- Repeat single words to him a lot, especially his name, and associate the words with an event or object. At times use gesture and excitement also: ‘It’s a ball!’ whilst pointing to one in a book or somewhere close by.

These conversations are extremely important, because you are showing him how to talk and understand. He is also getting the feeling of a ‘him’ and a ‘you’ and a joining in the middle through language. This is a new and complicated concept and is the basis for all his relationships throughout his life.

- Babies are interested in picture books from a very early age (see topic ‘**Reading with babies**’).

Your baby:

- coos and gurgles with pleasure
- begins babbling and then listening at around three to four months
- ‘talks’ to toys at around five to six months
- turns head to sound.



Activities for a three to six month old child

- Talk to your baby all the time, telling her what you are doing and what different noises are.
- Make faces and blow raspberries on her belly.
- Sing to her.
- Place her on the floor in a safe place on her tummy for short periods to play.
- Place her on the floor without a nappy to allow her the freedom to kick.
- Provide her with bright objects to look at and place some within reaching distance so that she can accidentally touch them initially and then try to touch them again.
- Provide her with a variety of things to do and either change what she is looking at or move her to a different spot so she has something else to look at.
- Place colourful toys nearby for her to touch / try to touch, look at and hit.



ALERT!

These are very important months. Don't hesitate to get help from your doctor or community health nurse if:

- your baby is unhappy or unsettled much of the time
- you are unhappy or anxious much of the time
- your baby is not turning to look for you when you speak
- your baby is not smiling and cooing even some of the time
- your baby is not kicking his legs
- you feel that you and your baby just aren't getting on together as well as you would like.

SAFETY!

- Your baby can now grasp some small objects and put them in his mouth, which means that he may swallow them or they may cause him to choke.
- Babies often roll over by the time they are four or five months old and can get into danger quickly. Make sure that she is not left alone unless she is in a safe place.

Summary

Social emotional:

- laughs aloud by about three months (range two to four months)
- enjoys being played with (laughs, kicks) by four months.

Signs that suggest that the baby may have a developmental problem:

- the baby shows no obvious pleasure in interacting with people
- the baby is not making eye contact with people.

Motor skills, vision and hearing:

- rolls over around five months (range four to six months)
- lifts head and chest when laying on tummy by four months
- looks at hands and plays with own fingers by about three months.
- can grasp an object by three to four months
- starts being able to chew around five to six months
- watches activities of those around her
- makes eye contact
- likes looking at people and bright objects.

Signs that suggest that the baby may have a developmental problem:

- muscle tone and power unusually low or high
- fingers not extending spontaneously
- arms and legs held flexed most of the time
- not following activities with eyes.

Daily activities:

- has more or less a daily routine
- begins to react to familiar situations by smiling, cooing and excited movements
- parents able to say whether the baby 'enjoys' things, like baths or being undressed
- recognises breast/bottle, makes movements showing pleasure.

Signs that suggest that the baby may have a developmental problem:

- parents persistently unable to settle baby
- lack of adequate weight gain.



Cognition:

- recognises mother and other close family members
- shows interest in what is going on around him.

Signs that suggest that the baby may have a developmental problem:

- does not seem to recognise mother or others
- shows a lack of interest in surroundings.

Speech and language:

- turns head to a talking person by five months
- searches for a sound (turns head) by four months
- makes lots of little vocalisations
- takes turns when 'talking' with parents.

Signs that suggest that the baby may have a developmental problem:

- not startling to loud noises
- not seeking sounds with eyes
- no vocalisations.

Note: All children are different and 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, if your child is very different from other children, if you are worried about your child's development or if the baby seems not to be progressing or going backwards, you should seek the advice of a doctor or community child health nurse. If there is a problem, getting help and ideas early will help most. Otherwise it is good to have reassurance that your children are developing normally in their own unique way and to remember that what matters is to support them in 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,
in the phone directory under 'Child Health Centres'
or www.health.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
- Parenting WA Line
Telephone (08) 6279 1200 (24hr service)
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 654 432



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