

Child development (2) - three to six months

Most parents find having a baby from three months very enjoyable. Your baby will have overcome many of the internal 'settling down' processes that newborns have. They are most likely a very social being, who delights in being with you, and you have usually learned enough of your baby's ways and messages to get their responses right most of the time.

Social and emotional development

Your baby has learned that you are the person (or one of the people) who comes a lot of the time to meet their needs, but they don't yet understand that you are a separate person. They still have a notion that the whole of life is happening inside themselves, and they are 'making it all happen'. They easily become overstimulated, so take care - when your baby has too much excitement, they will cry and need to be calmed down.

At four months, your baby:

- Enjoys eye contact and having 'conversations'
- Smiles lots
- Laughs out loud and squeals with delight
- Shows they enjoy life by laughing and kicking their legs
- Likes people
- Is interested in surroundings and activities.

Physical development and motor skills

Your baby is starting to get some control over their body. It is good for them to spend time on their tummy on the floor, kicking their legs and waving their arms. This strengthens muscles and helps the progression to crawling. Your baby:

- Rolls over from front to back at about four to six months.
- Is able to lift their head and chest when they are on their tummy by four months.
- When on tummy, will wave legs and arms about.
- Plays with fingers from three to four months.
- Is able to hold objects for brief periods.
- Brings toys and objects to mouth by hand.
- Topples over if put into sitting position.

Hearing and looking

Sounds as well as sights are becoming familiar and defined. Exploration is important, so give them time to look properly at objects and try to help them to be comfortable (to aid concentration). Your baby:

- Follows you with their eyes, looks from one object to another and focuses on small objects
- Checks their perception by grasping and mouthing the objects
- Recognises voices and turns their head towards them.

Speech and language

Your baby is making a whole range of sounds, and shows interest in how your mouth works and how the sounds come out. Conversations are very important. When your baby makes a sound, repeat it so they know what sound they have made. Show your tongue and practise words together, like 'ma' and 'da'. Your baby:

- Coos and gurgles with pleasure
- Babbles and listens
- Turns head towards sounds.

Suggested activities

Suggestions on encouraging and supporting your baby's development include:

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

Signs that suggest a developmental problem

All children are different and develop at different rates, so if your baby doesn't do all the things listed in this article, it may be because they are working on some different area of learning and development. However, if your baby is very different from other children, or if you are worried about their development or it seems to go backwards, seek the advice of a health professional.

Signs that could suggest a developmental problem include:

- 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
- Parents persistently unable to settle baby
- Lack of adequate weight gain
- Does not seem to recognise mother or others
- Shows a lack of interest in surroundings
- Doesn't startle to loud noises
- Doesn't seek sounds with eyes
- Doesn't vocalise at all.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Maternal and child health nurse
- The Maternal and Child Health Line is available 24 hours a day Tel. 132 229

Things to remember

- Your baby enjoys eye contact, smiling and having conversations.
- They easily become overstimulated, so take care.
- All children are different and develop at different rates, so if your baby doesn't do all the things listed in this article, it may be because they are working on some different area of learning and development.

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Better Health Channel

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