
Child development (3) - six to nine months

Summary

- By six to nine months of age, your baby begins to realise they are a separate person surrounded by their own skin.
 - Your baby loves to touch, grasp and 'make things happen'.
 - While your baby has been cooing and babbling for many weeks, their sounds now take on a closer resemblance to real words.
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By six to nine months of age, your baby begins to realise they are a separate person surrounded by their own skin. They no longer experience floating in a sea of feelings and needs, where the outside and the inside are all mixed together. They start to understand you are separate from them, and may worry when they can't see or feel you nearby.

Social and emotional development

Your baby's 'insides' feel more organised to them. They begin to recognise and identify different feelings and sensations - for example, what 'hungry' or 'lonely' feels like. Other developmental characteristics include:

- Desires of their own - for example, wanting to be picked up or given a particular toy.
- The ability to recognise the important, familiar people in their world (which also makes them sensitive to strangers).
- Enjoyment of being talked to and played with, since this is a very sociable age.

Physical development

Your baby will put everything into their mouth. Their lips and tongue are the most sensitive parts of their body and give them lots of information about shape, texture and taste. Your baby:

- Will start to take some mashed solids around this time and, later, some soft finger foods such as toast (under your supervision)
- Finds it hard to work out the eating action because they are used to sucking, so keeping the food inside their mouth can be a challenge
- May find different food textures strange at first
- Is learning they can swallow some bits of the world (such as food) but not others (such as their teddy bear).

Moving about

At some time during these four months, your baby will be able to:

- Roll over, from front to back and back to front
- Sit alone for a few moments when you put them into a sitting position and then, later, manage to sit alone without toppling over
- Do push-ups when on their tummy
- Start to move while on their tummy, first 'commando' style (pulling along on the arms) and then crawling on all fours
- Reach for a rattle and shake it
- Swap a toy from one hand to the other
- Find their feet, play with them and put them in their mouth.

Seeing and hearing

Your baby will be able to:

- Focus on small objects, since their eye muscles will be working well
- Develop a perception of depth and, therefore, be afraid of heights and falling
- See a drop below them and understand that it is scary (by nine months)
- Turn towards familiar sounds and voices
- Make sounds themselves, not only verbally but by banging objects together.

Speech and language

While your baby has been cooing and babbling for many weeks, their sounds now take on a closer resemblance to real words. Your baby:

- Probably puts a vowel and a consonant together, as in 'mum' or 'bubub'
- Might say 'mama' because they can, rather than because they understand the meaning of the word
- Will work out how to use the different sounds by noticing how you respond to them
- Enjoys making sounds
- Experiments with and copies different sounds, such as clicks and lip bubbles, as well as their word-like sounds
- Uses lots of different words and sounds to express different emotions
- Listens carefully when you speak, and tries to talk back using babbling sounds.

Suggested activities

Your baby loves to touch, grasp and 'make things happen'. Fun activities, such as shaking or banging objects, help them to understand they have an effect on the world. Conceptually, they are learning about up and down as well as coming and going, and will love to play games that act these things out. Suggestions on encouraging and supporting your baby's development include:

- Babies need interaction with other people much more than play-time with toys.
- Talk to them.
- Look into their eyes.
- Play games like 'Here is your nose - here is mummy's nose'.
- Play the game of picking up their dropped toy (over and over - babies of this age love it).
- Play 'ah boo' as you hide your face behind a book or cloth, then say their name when you come out.

Signs that suggest a developmental problem

Children develop at different rates, so if your baby doesn't do all the things listed in this article, it may be that your child's development pattern is still within the normal range. 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:

- Needing help to sit up
- Not smiling or laughing out loud
- Inability to grasp, hold or shake things
- Not reaching out for objects and putting them in their mouth
- Not turning to you when you call their name
- Resistance to trying 'solid' foods
- Inability to make a range of sounds
- No eye contact
- Not showing pleasure when seeing familiar people
- Seeming not to recognise mother and significant others.

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

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