

Child development: 3-6 months

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Remember, the information on this fact sheet should not be used or relied on as an alternative to professional care. If you have a particular problem, see your health care professional.

- She will still easily become over stimulated, so take care - when she does have too much excitement she will 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 her surroundings and activities going on around
- clearly shows enjoyment at being bathed, talked to etc.

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 babies old 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 be making eye contact with you and you will be smiling at each other. She will be able to 'read' some of your expressions and she will look worried if you look cross or worried.
- She has learnt that you are the person [or one of the people] who comes a lot of the time to meet her needs but she does not yet fully

understand that you are a separate person.

- She still has a 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 she is seven months or older.

When you understand what she wants and try to meet her needs she feels that the world is safe and predictable and good things come from inside her as well as from you. She 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 she will be having 'conversations' with each other, she will be getting excited at the feeling of you responding to her and kick her legs and wave her arms.

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.



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For more information on this topic or any issues related to pregnancy, birth or babies, call the free 24 hour helpline:

1800 882 436



- 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 good for him 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 Syndrome (SIDS). See the topics 'Safe sleep for babies and toddlers' for more information.

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 4-6 months
- is able to lift head and chest when on his tummy by 4 months
- when on tummy will lift and wave his arms and legs about
- begins to discover his hands belong to him and plays with fingers about 3-4 months
- grabs and plays with his toes when lying on back about 4-5 months
- is able to hold objects for brief periods at 3-4 months
- brings toys and objects to mouth if put in his hand
- swipes at dangling objects 3-4 months, but usually misses
- topples over if put in sitting position
- grabs for a toy such as a block, rattle at around 5 months
- is able to support own weight when stood on feet [this does not mean he is ready to walk]
- when being held he grabs at hair, spectacles, other objects like badges or chains.



- sits up while being held by hands

Hearing and vision

She is starting to get a handle on the shape of the world 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 recognize 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 practice 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.
- Repeat single words to him a lot - especially his name - and associate them with an event or object.

These conversations are extremely important, not just because you are teaching him to talk but also because he is 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 can start to be interested in books from a very early age.

Your baby:

- coos and gurgles with pleasure
- begins babbling and then listening at around 3-4 months
- 'talks' to toys at around 5-6 months
- turns head to sound

Activities for a 3-6 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 her mouth which means that she may swallow them or they may cause her to choke.

Babies often roll over by the time they are 4 or 5 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 3 months, (range 2-4 months)
- enjoys being played with (laughs, kicks) by 4 months

Signs that suggest that the child 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 5 months (range 4 to 6 months)
- lifts head and chest when prone by 4 months
- looks at hands and plays with own fingers, about 3 months
- can grasp an object by 3-4 months
- starts being able to chew 5-6 months
- watches activities of those around
- makes eye contact
- likes looking at people and bright objects

Signs that suggest that a child 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, being undressed
- recognises bottle, makes movements showing pleasure

Signs that suggest that a child may have a developmental problem

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

Thinking and understanding

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

Signs that suggest that a child 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 5 months
- searches for a sound (turns head) by 4 months
- makes lots of little vocalisations
- takes turns when 'talking' with parents

Signs that suggest that a child 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 it seems to go backwards, you should seek the advice of a health professional. If there is anything wrong, getting in early will help. 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 on moving forward from where they are now.

Resources

Parent Line in your state or territory
Maternal and Child Health Service

References

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