



Government of Western Australia  
Child and Adolescent Health Service  
WA Country Health Service

# child development **0-3 months**



**better health · better care · better value**

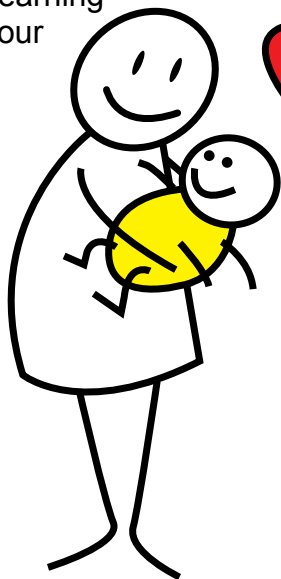
The world's a big and scary place for a new baby. She doesn't know that you're there to comfort, feed and care for her.

She can't understand that she's comfortable because she's full and safe, or uncomfortable because she's afraid or hungry.

From your smell and voice, she'll quickly learn to recognise that you're the person who comforts and feeds her most, but not that you're her parent.

However, even from birth, she'll start to communicate with you with signals when she's tired and hungry, or awake and alert.

Your baby is learning all the time. Your job is to help her know that the world is a friendly place, where her needs will be met, so she can learn to feel safe and loved.



## Social and emotional

For your new baby, everything is new and scary at first, even a nappy change.

- He doesn't know that he's a person.
- He doesn't know who comes when he cries.
- He feels happy when feeding, but doesn't know what 'happy' is.
- He cries when he's hungry or tired, but doesn't understand you're there to care for him.

## Crying

Babies under 3 months often cry a lot, especially in the late afternoon or evening.

We're not sure, but this crying, often called colic, might be partly caused by your baby simply being overwhelmed by everything that's happening, both inside his body and outside.

**'Jiggling' is not a good way to settle your baby.**

**It can be very scary or even painful, even if he stops crying.**

**It is important to never shake a baby.**

Newborn babies do not cry 'for attention' or to punish their parents.

In her first 3 months, a new baby cannot decide to cry. She'll cry because of something she's feeling or that's happening. She doesn't understand WHAT is happening and that you might be able to help her feel better.

Your baby likes the full feeling she has after a feed, when she hears your soothing voice, or when she's being cuddled.

She doesn't like feeling hungry or frightened.

But she can't understand that feelings are caused by a full tummy or hunger.

## Why does he cry when I'm upset?

Because babies feel but aren't yet able to think, your baby will pick up your feelings. He'll be calm when you're calm, and unhappy if you are unhappy.

If you feel upset, he'll feel upset too, though he won't know why he's feeling that way.

So, when you're tired and frazzled, your baby may be hard to settle, making things seem even worse!

## Each baby is different

It really is true.

Each baby has a different personality. She may be easy going and placid, or shy and worried, or easily upset.

You'll get to know this over the next few months.

Your baby is different and will grow and develop in the way that is right for her.

## Your face and voice

- The human face is the first and most important shape that your baby learns.
- The sounds of human voices are also important, even though he doesn't understand them.
- Your baby is interested in you – especially your voice and your face.
- Looking into someone's eyes is a vital part of forming close and loving relationships. Show her your face and gently talk to your baby right from the start.
- Don't feel rejected if she sometimes turns away. Tiny babies often get tired when they interact – she just needs a rest.
- Babies need to feel safe – that you're looking after them. They often begin to smile at a familiar face and look at you carefully by 4 to 6 weeks.

## Physical development **Hearing and seeing**

### Still developing

Although babies are ready to live and grow outside the womb, parts of their bodies are still immature.

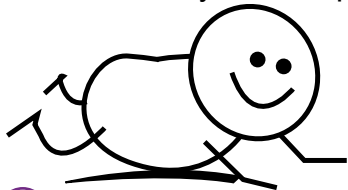
Your new baby's body is all brand new and never been used before!

It will take the first 3 months to get his digestive system running smoothly. You can tell by his face when he's focused on whatever's going on inside his tummy.

### When it's all too much

Since your baby doesn't understand what's happening around her, she can become upset if there's too much to see or do.

She can easily feel overwhelmed by sounds, colours, shapes and touch. Sometimes it's just too much! Loud noises may frighten her in the first months, but you can soothe her by talking in a gentle voice, humming, playing lullabies, or playing music she heard while you were pregnant.



Newborn babies can hear – she's been hearing noises from well before she was born.

She can see, but only see close things clearly.

- In the first 3 months she'll be attracted by faces, bright lights and colours, stripes, dots and patterns, but not understand what she's seeing.
- She'll first recognise that eyes, nose and mouth make a face.
- Then your baby will begin to recognise particular faces and other things like her teddy. Hang pictures of faces and simple toys above her cot to give her practice at looking and learning.

### Moving

Your new baby will move his body while he's awake, but he doesn't know how to make each part of his body move, or even that all the bits belong to him.

In the first 8 weeks, he has no control over his movements – they are involuntary (reflex).

Sucking, grasping (holding something tight in his hand), and startling ('jumping' when there is a loud noise or when he's suddenly moved) are all reflexes.

From about 8 weeks, your baby will begin to watch his hands and feet wave in the air, and begin to wave his fist towards your face or something he wants. He's starting to get the idea that he has a body that moves, feels and has skin all round it, and that he has some control over what it does!

He'll start to work out how to lift his head when lying on his tummy, and kick his legs.

### Speech and language

- Babies show how they feel through their face, voice and body movements.
- Crying is the main way your newborn baby can let you know something is wrong, and soon she 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, for her, all her needs are immediate and urgent.
- Try to respond to your baby as quickly as you can so she begins to understand that you'll be there when she calls out for you. This develops the feeling of security, which is very important.

- By 7 or 8 weeks, your baby will be making cooing and simple sounds. She'll also listen to what you say, then make noises back as she 'talks' to you.

## Activities for young babies

- Make a face mobile and hang it above his cot, facing him.
- Stroke different parts of his body to see how he likes to be touched.
- Speak to him gently and use his name.
- Play music.
- Sing to him.
- Cuddle him a lot.
- Let him look at your face as you talk to him.
- Copy his little gestures.
- Gently rock him.



## Feeding and sleeping

Babies need to feed throughout the night in the first few months. Most babies wake every 2 to 3 hours for a feed, and sleep a total of 12 to 20 hours each day – this is normal.

Some babies will resettle when you just touch and soothe them – others may need a feed.

**Do not leave your baby on his tummy when he sleeps. Sleeping on the tummy increases the risk of Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy.**

## Your baby is unique

Every baby is different and may develop at different rates.

So, if your baby does not do some of these things, he may be 'working' on a different area of learning and development.

However, babies usually follow the same pattern of development, and it's good to feel that your baby is developing normally, in his own unique way.

If you are worried about your baby's development, or if he is very different from other babies, talk with your doctor or child health nurse. If there is a problem, it's better to get help early.

## Summary

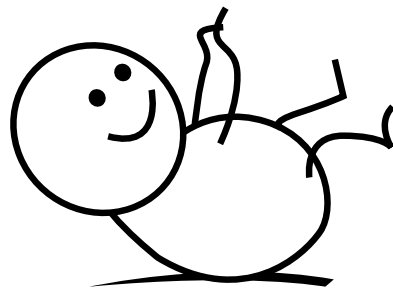
### Social and emotional

#### Your baby will probably be:

- watching your face when you're talking to him at around 4 to 8 weeks
- smiling by 5 to 8 weeks
- gurgling and laughing aloud by 3 months.

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

- you feel unable to cope with your baby's needs most of the time
- you see your baby in a negative way (as difficult) or are disappointed with him
- you don't feel able to respond to him
- your baby doesn't usually calm down, at least for a short while, when you pick him up
- your baby has a high pitched cry
- your baby doesn't smile at you by 8 weeks.



## Motor skills, vision and hearing

#### Your baby should:

- turn to the same side to suckle when you touch her cheek right from birth
- follow a moving light with her eyes for a couple of seconds by 4 weeks
- have her eyes lined up most of the time by 6 weeks
- lift her head when lying on her tummy from around 4 to 8 weeks
- kick her legs strongly and move her arms, fingers and legs freely by 2 months
- watch a moving face by 2 to 3 months.

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

- is unusually 'floppy' or stiff
- has an arm and leg on one side that is stiffer, floppier, stronger or weaker than on the other – or if one side is moving more than the other
- has unusually 'good' head control – stiff neck and back muscles
- always holds her fingers in a tight fist
- is not watching faces by 2 to 3 months
- is not startled by noise
- is not chuckling and smiling at 3 months.

## Daily activities

#### Your baby will probably:

- feed well after a couple of weeks
- still have no clear day and night pattern of wake 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 hours each day
- is hard to settle
- seems quite different to other babies – too tense, too calm.

## Speech and language

#### Your baby will probably:

- be startled by loud sounds
- begin listening to voices and making cooing sounds, especially when you talk to her, by 7 weeks.

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

- is not watching your face when you speak to her by 2 to 3 months
- doesn't seem to react to sounds.

## SAFETY!

Even though your baby can't roll, he can wriggle and kick, so never leave him alone on a high surface such as your bed or a change table.

## For more information contact

- **HealthyWA**  
[www.healthywa.wa.gov.au](http://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au)
- **Local child health nurse**
- **Local family doctor**
- **Ngala Helpline** (8am–8pm everyday)  
(08) 9368 9368 (Outside metro 1800 111 546)  
[www.ngala.com.au](http://www.ngala.com.au)
- **Raising Children Network**  
[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)
- **Kidsafe WA** (8.30am–5pm weekdays)  
(08) 6244 4880 (Outside metro 1800 802 244)  
[www.kidsafewa.com.au](http://www.kidsafewa.com.au)
- **Red Nose** (Sids and Kids)  
[rednose.com.au](http://rednose.com.au)



We've used 'he' and 'she' in turn – please change to suit your child.

**This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.**

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