



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

child development 3-6 months



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Your baby's come a long way in his first 3 months. He's probably now a very social being who loves being with you and having fun together.

By now, you've learned enough of his ways and messages to respond properly – most of the time. Hopefully, early problems such as feeding difficulties and crying, have settled down.

By 3 or 4 months, your baby is beginning to get an idea about being in the world, and you're getting to know each other.

She'll be happily looking into your eyes, and you'll be smiling at each other.

Social and emotional

Your baby can now 'read' some of your expressions. She'll smile when you show you're happy, and may look worried if you look cross or tired.

She has learnt that you are the person who usually comes when she needs something, but she still doesn't 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 7 months or older.

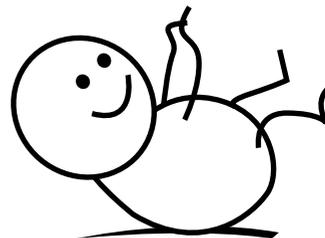
When you understand what she wants and try to meet her needs, she feels that the world is safe and predictable, and good things come from inside her as well as from you.

She is learning the important lesson that relationships are rewarding and that she is valuable.

At this stage, because she gets so much pleasure from smiling and interacting with you, she's happy to smile and interact with strangers.

Have 'conversations' with each other – she will get 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 – too much excitement and she may start to cry and need to be calmed down.



At 4 months your baby:

- smiles a lot
- 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 things like being bathed and talked to.

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'll spend time looking carefully at his hands, and touching and looking at his feet – what it feels like from the outside as well as the inside – and that it's all attached.

He will grasp at objects in front of him now – you'll need to put stronger mobiles above his cot and pram/stroller.

Tummy time

It's important for your baby to spend time on his tummy on the floor, kicking his legs and waving his arms as if he's swimming.

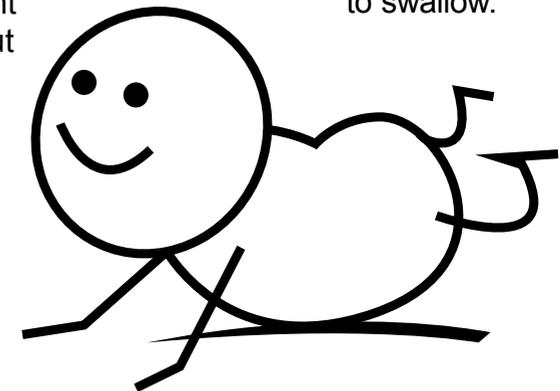
This strengthens his back and helps him start to learn how to crawl. After a while he may get frustrated with not being able to move forward or hold his head up – give him as long as he's happy with.

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

Put interesting things on the floor near him so he'll try to move towards them when he's ready.

He will bring everything to his mouth – that's his way of exploring the shape and texture of objects.

Use rattles, plastic spoons and toys – anything colourful and smooth, and small enough to hold but too large to swallow.



Your baby:

- rolls over from her front to her back at about 4 to 6 months
- can lift her head and chest when on her tummy by 4 months
- will lift and wave her arms and legs about when on her tummy
- begins to discover her hands belong to her, and plays with her fingers at about 3 to 4 months
- grabs and plays with her toes when lying on her back at about 4 to 5 months
- can hold objects for a short time at 3 to 4 months
- brings toys and objects you put in her hand up to her mouth
- swipes at dangling objects at 3 to 4 months, but usually misses
- sits when being held by her hands. May sit for a short time on her own from 5 months.
- grabs for toys at around 5 months
- can support her own weight when stood on her feet (don't do this too often – it doesn't mean she's ready to walk)
- grabs at hair, glasses and so on when you hold her.

Hearing and seeing

Your baby is starting to understand the world around her.

She can follow you with her eyes, look from one object to another, and focus on small objects.

If she can, she'll check what she sees by grabbing and mouthing the object. She thinks, 'that's round and smooth and mum keeps saying "spoon" – this "spoon" thing exists in the world as an object in its own right.

Her exploring is important, so make her comfortable, and give her time to concentrate and look properly at objects.

Sounds are also becoming familiar and defined – your baby will recognise voices and turn her head towards them.

Speech and language

Long before he can speak, your baby's listening to you. He's beginning to make the little noises and sounds that come before speech. When you imitate these, you're 'talking' to your baby.

By responding to your baby's needs when he cries, you are showing that you've heard him and that he matters. This is the start of communication.

- Show him your tongue and practise simple sounds together like 'maa' and 'daa'. He'll be interested in how your mouth works and how the sound comes out.
- When he makes a sound, repeat it so he knows what sound he's just made. You've started a conversation game between you!
- Repeat single words to him a lot – name what he is seeing (a spoon) and what you are doing (bath). Say his name.

These conversations are really important. He is learning to talk, but he is also discovering that there is a 'him' and a 'you', and that language can help join the two of you. This sets the basis for all his relationships for the rest of his life.

Books

Babies can be interested in books from a very early age, so read to her often.

Your baby:

- coos and gurgles with pleasure by 3 to 6 months
- begins babbling and then listening at around 3 to 4 months
- 'talks' to toys at around 5 to 6 months
- turns her head towards sounds by 3 to 6 months.

Activities

- Talk to your baby all the time, telling her what you are doing and what different noises are. Use simple words and very short sentences.
- Make faces and blow raspberries on her belly.
- Sing to her.
- Put her on the floor on her tummy to play for short periods.
- Put her on the floor without a nappy so she can freely kick her legs.
- Give her bright objects to look at. Put some within reaching distance so that she accidentally touches them – then she'll try to touch or hit them again.
- Provide her with different things to do – change what she's looking at or move her so she has something else to look at.



ALERT!

These are very important months. Talk to 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 as well as you would like.

SAFETY!

Your baby can now grasp small objects and put them in her mouth, which means that she may swallow or choke on them.

By 4 or 5 months, babies often roll over and can get into danger quickly.

Make sure that she's not left alone unless she's in a safe place.

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

By 4 months, your baby will probably:

- be laughing aloud
- enjoy being played with – laughing and kicking.

Talk with your doctor or child health nurse if:

- your baby shows no obvious pleasure in being with people
- he's not making eye contact with people.

Motor skills, vision and hearing

Your baby will probably:

- look at her hands and play with her fingers at about 3 months
- be able to hold an object by 3 to 4 months

- lift her head and chest when on her tummy by 3 to 4 months
- start being able to chew at around 5 to 6 months
- roll over between 4 and 6 months
- watch the actions of people around her
- make eye contact
- like looking at people and bright objects.

Talk with your doctor or nurse if:

- your baby seems more floppy or stiff than other babies
- she's not opening and closing her hands and fingers
- she holds her arms and legs in the same position most of the time
- she's not looking around at objects and people.

Daily activities

Your baby will probably:

- have developed some daily routines
- begin to react to familiar situations by smiling, cooing and excited movements
- recognise the breast or bottle, and make movements showing pleasure

You'll start to know whether your baby 'enjoys' things like baths or being undressed.

Talk with your doctor or nurse if:

- it's still hard to help him settle
- he's not gaining weight.

Thinking and understanding

Your baby:

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

Talk with your doctor or nurse if:

- your baby doesn't seem to recognise you or others
- he does not seem interested in things around him.

Speech and language

Your baby:

- searches for a sound (turns his head) by 4 months
- turns his head towards someone talking by 5 months
- makes lots of little sounds
- takes turns when 'talking' with you.

Talk with your doctor or nurse if:

- your baby doesn't react to sounds
- he's not making sounds
- he doesn't turn and look to see where sounds are coming from.

For more information contact

- **HealthyWA**
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
- **Raising Children Network**
www.raisingchildren.net.au
- **Kidsafe WA** (8.30am–5pm weekdays)
(08) 6244 4880 (Outside metro 1800 802 244)
www.kidsafewa.com.au
- **Red Nose** (Sids and Kids)
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.

This publication is provided for general education and information purposes. Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.

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