



Newborn to 4 weeks

From 2 to 4 weeks, babies can briefly lift their heads when lying prone. They can focus on and track a face or object 20–30 cm (8–12 inches) away. This means your baby can look at you when they're drinking. Loud noises startle them, make them jump or wake them up. Their movements are symmetrical. A baby's neck muscles are very weak until 4 months of age. It's very important to support their head when picking them up.

Children are born with immature brains that develop with experience. They learn through their senses. Touch is particularly important for a child's physical, emotional and mental development.

To stimulate their development:

- ✓ Hold and rock them.
- ✓ Put them on your shoulders and walk around so they can see all the different objects in their environment.
- ✓ Cuddle them or gently caress them when you change or bathe them, or at any other time.
- ✓ Change their position often.
- ✓ Move them around several times a day.
- ✓ Talk to them often while looking at them.
- ✓ Sing nursery rhymes, songs and lullabies.
- ✓ Play soft music.
- ✓ Start reading small board books as part your daily routine.
- ✓ Hang a mobile over their crib.

When your baby is wide awake and you can keep a close eye on them, lay them on their stomach on a firm surface so they can practise lifting and turning their head. This helps prevent flat head syndrome.

At 2 months

Your child has already started to make sounds and to smile at those around them. They can visually tell their mother from their father. If they hear a sudden or unusual noise, they cry or stop moving. They stop crying and calm down temporarily if one of their parents speaks to them, even if they can't see their face. They can hold their head up at a 45° angle while lying prone. They follow objects with their eyes for a short distance.

They can hold a rattle in their hand (grasp reflex), but can't manipulate it skillfully or release it as they want. They're starting to put their hands to their mouth.

Their neck muscles are gradually getting stronger. By around four months, they should be able to hold their head up.

To stimulate their development:

- ✓ Put them on their tummy when they're wide awake and you can keep an eye on them.
- ✓ Respond to the sounds they make (smile, mimic their sounds).
- ✓ Talk to them often, expressively and animatedly while looking at them.
- ✓ Hum and sing to them.
- ✓ Gently squeeze sound toys from about 30 cm (12 inches) away.
- ✓ Place objects with attractive, contrasting colours (mobile) in their field of vision.
- ✓ Move them several times a day.
- ✓ Change their position often.
- ✓ Read small board books as part your daily routine.

Note: While it's dangerous to put a newborn to sleep on their stomach, tummy time is recommended when they're awake to help them learn to hold their head up. This may also help prevent sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).

Toy suggestions (must be bigger than mouth):

- › Shatterproof mirror
- › Teething ring
- › Rattle
- › Sound toys
- › Soft animal toys with no detachable parts
- › Board books

At 4 months

Your baby is starting to roll over from belly to back. They can control their head when held upright in your arms and can lift it up when lying on their stomach. They'll soon be able to sit with support for short periods of time. They laugh loudly, call out and can recognize familiar voices and faces. They're intentionally communicating more and more varied needs, e.g., crying when hungry or uncomfortable, smiling when happy or content, laughing when something's funny, cooing at you and making a fuss to get picked up. They should be interested in noises and voices and look toward sounds in a quiet environment. Tell your doctor if you think your baby can't hear you—you'll need to have their hearing checked. Your baby can now follow objects with their eyes up to 180° and grasp toys with their whole hand. They can also pick up objects within reach and put them in their mouth. They have a short attention span, so it's a good idea to regularly change activities.

To stimulate their development:

- ✓ Try to understand their sounds and gestures and the looks they give you by putting into words what they're trying to tell you.
- ✓ Mimic the sounds they make and wait for a response.
- ✓ Speak expressively to your baby as often as you can—they like hearing different intonations.
- ✓ Constantly communicate with them.
- ✓ Use gestures when talking and singing nursery rhymes.
- ✓ Point to and name things in board books.
- ✓ Do tummy time with bare limbs as often as you can when they're awake and you can keep an eye on them.
- ✓ Move them several times a day.
- ✓ Put toys in their hands.
- ✓ Put them in front of a mirror.

At 6 months

Normal child development can vary. At six months, babies can often sit up for a while with little or no help, although they may need to lean forward on their hands. They can roll over from front to back and back to front. They may be able to belly crawl and should soon be able to get up on all fours. Lying on their back, they can grab their feet and even bring them to their mouth. They'll soon be able to transfer objects from one hand to the other. With a little help, your child can support their weight while standing. They're cooing more and more and starting to babble, i.e., forming meaningless syllables such as "baba." They're mimicking sounds, pouting, laughing when someone laughs and trying to interact with the people around them. They communicate to complain, make requests, express discomfort or joy or get your attention. Your baby recognizes familiar sounds and noises and understands certain routines. They have a preference for certain toys. Your child likes to pick up and drop objects over and over. They enjoy playing with sound toys (rattles).

To stimulate their development:

- ✓ Put them on their tummies often so they can start to crawl.
- ✓ Talk to them often and give them time to respond.
- ✓ Name the objects and actions involved in their daily activities (e.g., eyes, mouth, milk, wash, eat).
- ✓ Encourage them to have fun babbling by responding to them with babble or with words and by taking away their pacifier when they're awake.
- ✓ Use language at the level of a young child, but avoid childish words.
- ✓ Give them toys they can grasp, squeeze, move and hit. Try different textures. The most expensive toys aren't always the ones they enjoy the most. For example, babies love kitchen items such as plastic measuring cups, saucepans, wooden spoons and so on.

Toy suggestions:

- › Nesting toys (plastic dishes)
- › Colourful rings so you can make sounds and syllables through the opening and draw your child's attention to speech
- › Plastic animals to start mimicking their sounds (e.g., moo, woof)
- › Board books with images of familiar items, people and animals
- › Small blanket to play peek-a-boo with

At 9 months

Your child babbles, stringing together syllables such as “da-da” and “pa-pa.” If they have a pacifier, try to limit its use to sleep time. When your child is awake, pacifiers should only be used for comforting purposes from time to time so as not to interfere with babbling, an important stage in language development. Your child will soon start asking for and drawing your attention to things and people by pointing at them. They use their hands to say “hooray” and “goodbye.” They enjoy playing peek-a-boo. They respond to their name. They quickly turn their attention to faint noises outside their field of vision.

They can sit up without help and they sit upright. They hardly ever fall down when they're sitting. They use their hands to maintain balance and can bend over to reach for things around them. They can crawl on their belly or on all fours. Soon, they'll be able to stand up in their crib or using a step for support. They'll be able to climb stairs on all fours. Their fine motor skills have progressed, and they can now grasp small objects between their thumb and other fingers (pincer grasp). They can hold their bottle or sippy cup. They can hand you objects. They can uncover and retrieve a toy that was just covered by something (object permanence). Keep in mind that not all children develop at the same pace—these are just typical milestones for this age.

To stimulate language and communication development in daily life:

- ✓ Talk to your child regularly, at their level and facing them. Give them time to respond with sounds or gestures.
- ✓ Draw their eyes to you when showing them something and name it.
- ✓ Name the things they point at with their finger.
- ✓ Talk to them about what you're doing and what they're seeing and doing.
- ✓ Respond to their babbling with syllables and words.
- ✓ Look at picture books with them, naming and pointing to things.
- ✓ Let them handle board books.
- ✓ Make the sounds associated with different toys (e.g., animals, vehicles).
- ✓ Sing songs and liven up nursery rhymes with gestures.
- ✓ Name body parts.

Toy suggestions:

- › Big building blocks
- › Balls
- › Push and pull toys
- › Board books with bright, colourful images
- › Activity boards
- › Plastic animals
- › Stacking rings
- › Empty containers
- › Floating bath toys
- › Sensory books (textured images, scratch-and-smell images, etc.)

At 12 months

Your child turns around and looks you straight in the eye when you call them by their name. By around age one, they'll start using words. For example, they'll call their father "Daddy" and their mother "Mommy." They understand several words and simple instructions such as "give," "wait" and "take." They point to the things they want.

Most children can now stand and walk on their own or with help. They love to move around at this age. They climb stairs and furniture. They want to get to everything, have everything and do things on their own. Let them have fun exploring: climbing, rolling, falling, getting up. You need to encourage their urge to explore and be independent while anticipating possible hazards to reduce the risk of injury.

They love cause-and-effect toys (press a button and something pops out).

Symbolic play is developing (they talk on the phone, feed their doll).

To stimulate their development:

- ✓ Let them crumple and tear paper.
- ✓ Let them handle board books and turn the pages.
- ✓ Give them magazines to flip through and look at.
- ✓ Name things in picture books and tell them short stories.
- ✓ Play ball with them.
- ✓ Include them in your daily activities so they can imitate you.
- ✓ Teach them the sounds of animals and certain objects.
- ✓ Name body parts.
- ✓ Listen to them and respond to their sounds, jargon and words.
- ✓ Use simple words and short sentences when talking to them and go down to their level.
- ✓ Name and comment on the things they see and do.
- ✓ Sing and recite nursery rhymes using gestures.
- ✓ Let them ask for what they want instead of anticipating their needs.
- ✓ Teach them the gestures associated with certain words (e.g., goodbye, hooray).

Remember that to develop, children need to feel loved, to be and feel safe, to interact with other people and to see and do new things.

Toy suggestions:

- › Picture books with images of people and everyday items and activities
- › Push and pull toys
- › Building sets (big pieces)
- › Wooden puzzles
- › Musical instruments
- › Cause-and-effect toys (e.g., spinning top, surprise box, doors to open)
- › Plastic animals
- › Telephone
- › Dolls

At 18 months

To stimulate their development:

- ✓ Have them imitate simple activities.
- ✓ Let them get undressed with some help.
- ✓ Play music.
- ✓ Give them small tasks.
- ✓ Read them stories.
- ✓ Look at photo albums and name people, things and actions.
- ✓ Talk to them, describing everyday objects and actions in their immediate surroundings using simple words and short sentences.
- ✓ Show interest in what they say by responding to them and rephrasing their words.
- ✓ Sing nursery rhymes and encourage them if they try to join in.
- ✓ Use words to describe what they're pointing at.
- ✓ Give them choices from time to time to encourage them to use their words.
- ✓ Put things they like in plain sight, but out of their reach, so they ask for them using words.

For children, playing isn't just about having fun, it's also about discovering the world around them. It helps them develop their imagination and creativity, and improves hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills. Through play, children learn to think and solve problems, to socialize and cooperate.

Playing with your child is a great way to spend time alone with them and give them the attention they need. It also helps you build a strong bond with them as they grow.

Toy suggestions:

- › Building toys with big pieces
- › Riding toys, push and pull toys
- › Cars, trucks, trains
- › Dolls
- › Large wooden puzzles
- › Crayons
- › Musical instruments
- › Hammer and workbench
- › Books
- › Telephone

At 2 years

Your child's communication skills are progressing rapidly. Not only is their vocabulary growing (75 to 150 words), but they can string together words to produce short sentences. What's more, they can combine speech with gestures to facilitate understanding. They turn around when you call their name and look you in the eye when you address them. They understand simple, contextual instructions and basic questions such as "where," "what" and "who." They understand and can handle more complex tasks. They can point to their main body parts. They can point to and name animals and familiar objects in picture books.

They like to help out around the house. They're curious and their imagination is growing. They play pretend, reproducing everyday activities in their play and creating little scenarios with figures, stuffed toys or dolls. They're proud of their achievements and share their enthusiasm with those around them. They're more and more interested in the children they meet.

They can use knobs and handles to open doors and can climb onto a couch and throw balls. They doodle. They know how to use spoons and cups. They can get undressed and are starting to put on certain pieces of clothing. They're nimble and curious, but have no sense of danger. They need constant supervision.

To stimulate their development:

- ✓ Play music and sing songs and nursery rhymes with them.
- ✓ Encourage physical activity.
- ✓ Teach them basic colours and concepts (e.g., big/small, up/down).
- ✓ Teach them the names and sounds of animals.
- ✓ Read them picture books and encourage them to participate by asking questions and naming what they see.

Language

Show interest in what your child says. Talk to them as often as you can using simple words and short sentences. Use everyday activities as language development opportunities. For example, name everyday objects in their surroundings and the actions they see. Listen to them and let them talk, making sure you get down to their level and look at them. If they make a mistake, repeat what they said the right way, but don't force them to say it again. Describe what your child is doing or seeing. Don't respond to gestural requests—make them use their words. You can offer some choices to get them to talk to you. Don't use childish or difficult language.

Play

You should play with your child as often as possible. However, they don't always need you to guide them along. They'll develop their independence and imagination by exploring simple toys and objects placed within their reach.

Toy suggestions:

- › Building sets (large wooden blocks or Lego®-style plastic blocks)
- › Nesting or interlocking toys (wooden puzzles)
- › Sports games
- › Dolls and accessories
- › Chalkboard
- › Real-life items and sets (airport, garage, stove, dishes, etc.)
- › Cars and trucks
- › Lotto games for young children (with stacking chips rather than cards)
- › Telephone
- › Doctor's kit (to facilitate the next checkup)
- › Balls
- › Modelling clay
- › Books with characters in action
- › Crayons
- › Finger paint
- › Cardboard boxes

Building sets and interlocking pieces give children the opportunity to solve problems. Toys that do too much, such as dolls that can talk, walk and eat, prevent children from using their imagination and coming up with their own scenarios.

At 3 years

Your child can understand various questions, 2–3-step instructions and the difference between words such as big/small, up/down, in/on, a little/a lot. They have a large vocabulary (over 750 words). They articulate well enough that even a stranger would understand at least 75% of what they say. They make complete sentences, conjugate verbs and are starting to use the pronoun "I." You can have a conversation with them. They're starting to recount events and are asking a lot of questions: What? Who? Where? Why? They create stories with dolls, figures, cars and so on. They play pretend (talk on the phone, play mom or dad, salesperson, etc.). They seek the company of other children and play with them. They may even have an imaginary friend.

They can name two primary colours, say their name and age and count to three. They can get completely undressed and partially dressed on their own. They can run, climb and go up and down stairs, alternating feet on each step. They can ride a tricycle. They can catch a ball with their hands. They can walk backwards and throw a ball. They can make a circle or cross on request. They like to help out and do things on their own. Most children are toilet-trained by day, but only 40% are toilet-trained at night. Children this age are aware that they're a boy or a girl. They may start exploring their genitals. Sexual curiosity is normal, but some guidance may be needed to make it more socially acceptable.

To stimulate their development:

- ✓ Teach them how to get dressed on their own.
- ✓ Encourage arts and crafts (safety scissors, paint, nesting toys).
- ✓ Read books with them.
- ✓ Answer their questions.
- ✓ Teach them the names of different types of clothes.
- ✓ Teach them colours.

- ✓ Correctly repeat incorrect or incomplete sentences (without having them repeat).
- ✓ Let them answer the phone.
- ✓ Teach them about the relationships between objects (bigger, smaller, etc.).
- ✓ Give them the opportunity to explore their surroundings so they can expand their vocabulary and general knowledge.
- ✓ Let them socialize.

How children learn

At this age, children mainly learn through play, routines and contact with others.

Play

Through play, children learn to make logical connections and develop their fine motor skills (manual dexterity) and gross motor skills (running, jumping, climbing). They also develop their imagination and creativity. Children love toys that allow them to experiment: simple puzzles, blocks, big Lego® blocks. They also like toys and sets that allow them to play pretend (e.g., cash registers, dish sets, tool sets, doll houses).

Routines

Daily routines give children structure and help them organize their day. That's why it's a good idea to establish routines for departure/arrival times, mealtime, bathtime and bedtime.

Contact with others

Children identify with the grown-ups around them. They learn by observing them, imitating them, copying what they do and repeating what they say. By playing with other children, they develop their language skills and learn to communicate, share, express their needs and feelings and even resolve conflicts.

At 4 years

Your child can hold a conversation, taking your questions into account. They can tell short stories, talk about what they've done or will be doing soon and say their full name. They're starting to solve and come up with their own riddles. They use long, complete sentences with verbs conjugated in past, present and future tenses. They use a variety of personal pronouns, including the now-familiar "I." At this age, children ask a lot of questions (Why? How? When?), and it's important to answer them to build their knowledge. They're usually easy to understand. The sounds "sh," "j," "th" and "r" may still be difficult to pronounce. They understand more complex instructions and more and more concepts such as "around," "in the middle" and "between." They remember song lyrics. They socialize and know the names of their friends at daycare.

Your child is aware of their gender and that of others. They know the difference between fantasy and reality. They're starting to be able to situate themselves in time (yesterday/today/tomorrow). They have a vivid imagination. They take turns playing and share with other children. They can draw people as faces with limbs and can count four items. They can use scissors, including cutting out pieces of paper. They can build a 10-block

tower. They can throw a ball, catch a big ball and ride a tricycle or a bicycle with training wheels. They can get dressed and undressed on their own (except for shoelaces). They're toilet-trained by day. However, 30% of children are not yet toilet-trained at night.

To develop their sense of rhythm, you can encourage them to dance to music. To prepare them for handwriting, which requires good pencil control, try colouring and drawing activities. Ask questions about stories and images to check their understanding and keep them engaged. Themes addressed in children's books (good guys, bad guys, fears, conflict resolution) foster exchanges between parents and children. Learning songs and nursery rhymes is a great way to exercise their memory. Encourage your child to be independent in day-to-day activities to boost their self-esteem and facilitate the transition to school.

Play

Play is a natural way for grown-ups and children to have fun together. Bear in mind, however, that children don't have the same endurance. In competitive play, be aware of your child's emotions. They have to learn to lose, but they can't lose all the time. Find playmates their own age.

Children also need to learn how to have fun on their own. This fosters creativity and autonomy. Play with them for a while then use an excuse like having to go to the bathroom to withdraw and let them play on their own.

Solo play suggestions

- › Safety scissors
- › Flyer cutting activities
- › Modelling clay
- › Coloured pencils
- › Puzzles
- › Building sets
- › Books
- › Table games (matching, memory)
- › Arts and crafts with recycled items
- › Creating stories and scenarios with dolls or figures
- › Dress-up
- › To motivate children, display their drawings and crafts

At 5 years

By age 5, your child can get dressed on their own. Their sentences are more complex. They can tell a story. They can write a few letters and draw a stick figure with a head, body, arms and legs. Their pronunciation is good, though they may still struggle with sounds like "sh," "j," "th" and "r." Their time perception is getting better. They distinguish between today, yesterday and tomorrow, and between morning and afternoon.

They can throw and catch a ball, jump rope, skate and pedal a tricycle or a bicycle with training wheels. Your child needs to go outside to play, run and jump. They love using their imagination to play make-believe. You should read them a book every day. Have fun finding words that rhyme (nursery rhymes and children's songs are good for this). This can help them learn to read by making the link between spoken and written language.

Your child should be fully toilet-trained by day, though accidents may still happen, especially when playing outside. At night, however, 20% of children still wet themselves regularly. This percentage goes down as the years go by.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is key to the harmonious development of personality. Parents can help their children build self-confidence in the following ways:

- ✓ Give them responsibilities suited to their abilities.
- ✓ Involve them in decisions that concern them.
- ✓ Set time aside each week for a special activity.
- ✓ Encourage and congratulate them in their endeavours.
- ✓ Don't make humiliating remarks when they fail.