

Baby Growth and Development: Baby's physical and mental growth and development

1. What is Baby Growth and Development?

The gradual changes in a baby's body, brain, language, thinking, feelings, and social behavior since birth are called Baby Growth and Development.

Growth: The increase in a baby's weight, height, and head circumference is called physical growth.

Development: The baby's ability to hold up their head, learn to sit, crawl, walk, talk, think, and communicate with other people is called development.

The pace of growth and development of each baby may be different. Therefore, it is important to monitor the baby's own progress without comparing it to other babies.

2. Birth to 3 months: Newborn growth and development

During this time, the child gradually learns to adapt to the outside environment.

Physical development

- The baby may lose some weight in the first few days after birth.
- Birth weight is usually regained within 10–14 days.
- The baby's weight then gradually increases.
- The baby moves his arms and legs and may startle at sudden noises.
- He may try to lift his head for a short time when placed awake on his stomach.

Sleep: Newborns usually sleep about 14-17 hours in a 24-hour period. However, the amount of sleep varies from baby to baby.

Care

- Breastfeed your baby.
- Put your baby to sleep on his/her back every time.
- Use a firm, flat, and safe sleeping surface.
- Talk to your baby and gently caress him/her.
- Follow the vaccination schedule.

3. 4–6 months: Baby's new skills

At this age, the baby becomes more interested in the environment around him.

Physical development

- Learns to hold his head up well.
- Reaches out and tries to grab a toy.
- Can bring a toy to his mouth.
- Can start rolling from tummy to side or from side to tummy.
- Can try to sit up with support.

Mental and Social Development

- Smiles at familiar people.
- Makes sounds to express joy.
- May begin to understand the difference between familiar people and strangers.
- Pays attention to toys or movements in the environment.

Language development

- Can make coo-coo sounds.
- Can laugh and make different noises.
- Can get dizzy when hearing familiar voices.

Food

It is generally recommended to give only breast milk for the first 6 months. If breast milk is not available or is not suitable, infant formula can be used as per the doctor's advice.

Complementary foods can be started when the baby is about 6 months old and shows signs of readiness. Do not force-feed the baby.

5. 10–12 months: Standing, first words and independence

A baby's mobility and communication skills may increase further around their first birthday.

Physical development

- Can stand holding onto furniture.
- Can walk sideways while holding onto furniture.
- Some babies can walk a few steps on their own.
- Develops ability to grasp small objects with their fingers.
- Can try to hold food with their own hands.

Emotional and Social Development

- Expresses joy at seeing a familiar person.
- May make gestures such as clapping or waving.
- Tries to find a toy when it is hidden.
- Enjoys familiar games.

Language Development

- May begin to understand the word “no.”
- May respond to familiar words.
- May say “mama” or “daddy” meaningfully.
- May raise their hand to ask for something.

Care

- Let the baby move around in a safe environment.
- Keep away from stairs, electrical sockets, sharp objects and hot drinks.
- Talk to the baby and show pictures from books.
- Have regular health check-ups around the baby's first birthday.

Remember: Not all babies start walking at 12 months. Some start walking later. However, if you have concerns about your baby's development, talk to your doctor.

6. 1–2 years: A time for walking, talking, and learning.

At this age, children actively want to learn about their environment.

Physical development

- Many children start walking between 12–18 months.
- Balance gradually improves while walking.
- Can sit down and get up again.
- Can push or pull toys.
- Can try to eat with a spoon.

Language development

- Learns to recognize the names of familiar objects.
- Gradually learns to say new words.
- Understands simple instructions.
- Many children use a few meaningful words by about 18 months.
- By 2 years of age, many children begin to say two words together, such as “water.”

Language acquisition can vary from child to child. However, significant delays in speaking or understanding should prompt an evaluation.

Mental development

- Recognizes familiar objects.
- Learns to do things by imitating.
- Tries to solve simple problems.
- Expresses likes and dislikes.

Social development

- Likes to be close to parents.
- Imitates the actions of others.
- May get angry or cry when expressing his wishes.
- Can play next to other children, although not always together.

Food

- Provide regular meals and healthy snacks as needed.
- Provide a variety of vegetables, fruits, pulses, grains, eggs, fish or other suitable protein sources.
- Let the child practice eating on his own.
- Prepare foods that are at risk of getting stuck in the throat in small and safe sizes.
- Avoid excess salt and sugar in the food of children under two years of age.

7. 2–3 years: Language, thinking and social skills

During this time, the child's language, imagination, and desire to work independently continue to grow.

Physical development

- Learns to walk and run well.
- Can throw or kick a ball.
- Try to climb stairs.
- Can arrange blocks and use simple toys.
- Can turn pages of a book.

Language development

- Uses sentences of two or more words.
- Can name familiar objects and people.
- Can ask simple questions.
- Try to explain their needs through language.
- May like to listen to short stories.

Mental and social development

- Can start imaginative play.
- Imitates the actions of others.
- Wants to do their own work.
- Expresses feelings like anger, joy, sadness.
- Is interested in playing with other children.

What parents can do

- Ask simple questions to the child and give them time to answer.
- Read storybooks every day.
- Provide opportunities for learning through play.
- Teach patiently when mistakes are made.
- Explain the rules calmly instead of hitting or threatening.

8. 3–5 Years: School Readiness and Full Development

During this time, the child's language, thinking, social communication and daily tasks improve.

Physical development

- Can run, jump and play sports.
- Increases the ability to catch or throw a ball.
- Learns to use pencils or colored pencils.
- Can draw simple pictures.
- Can participate in tasks such as getting dressed or washing hands.

Language and intellectual development

- Can speak in longer sentences.
- Asks questions and loves to listen to stories.
- Can learn to recognize colors, shapes and some numbers.
- Can talk about familiar events.
- Can act out imaginary stories and stories.

Social and emotional development

- Learns to play with other children.
- Practices waiting for his turn in play.
- Learns to understand some of the feelings of others.
- Expresses his preferences and opinions.
- Gradually acquires the ability to follow rules.

What parents can do

- Talk to the child every day.
- Teach through drawing, puzzles, songs, and stories.
- Provide opportunities for play in a safe environment.
- Give the child small responsibilities.
- Praise good behavior.
- Don't pressure them by comparing them to other children.

9. Normal weight and height of a child

A child's weight and height depend on his age, birth weight, nutrition, genetic characteristics and health.

The following information is for general guidance. These are not the final limits of a child's normal growth.

Age Normal growth characteristics

Weight and length at birth vary from child to child

By 5 months, many children have almost doubled their birth weight

By 12 months, many children have almost tripled their birth weight

Standing height is easier to measure at 2 years

Weight and height continue to increase steadily at 3–5 years

Important: A single weight or height is not enough to judge a child's growth. It is important to observe the continuity of growth over time. A pediatrician can assess the child using the WHO's age- and sex-specific growth charts.

10. How to help your baby's brain develop?

The brain develops rapidly in the first few years of a baby's life. A safe environment, nutrition, sleep and loving communication play an important role in this development.

Talk to your baby

Even if your baby cannot speak, talk to him/her. Name things during daily activities and respond to their sounds.

Read stories and books

Show pictures and name familiar objects. Encourage your baby to look at pictures in books and turn pages.

Provide opportunities for play

Use age-appropriate safe toys, blocks, balls and drawing materials.

Value your baby's feelings

Try to understand your baby's needs when he/she cries. Speak calmly and comfort him/her.

Ensure adequate sleep

Adequate sleep according to age helps your baby's learning, memory and physical growth.

Limit screen time

Especially for young children, talking directly to people, playing and reading books is more important. It is recommended to avoid screen use except for video calls when they are under two years of age. Limit screen time for two years and older and, if possible, show educational topics with adults.

11. Proper nutrition for children

Balanced nutrition is essential for the growth and development of the child.

From birth to 6 months

- Usually only breast milk is given.
- If breastfeeding is not possible, appropriate infant formula can be used on the advice of a doctor.
- Water or other food should not be given without special instructions from a doctor.

From about 6 months

- Continue breastfeeding and start complementary foods.
- Give soft, nutritious and age-appropriate foods.
- Gradually increase the variety and density of food.
- Watch the child's hunger and fullness signals.

1 year to 5 years

- Give a variety of vegetables, fruits, grains, pulses, eggs, fish, meat or other suitable proteins.
- You can give milk and dairy products according to the child's age.
- Limit excessively sweet drinks, sugar and foods with excess salt.
- Sit the child down during meals and keep an eye on them.

Warning: Do not give honey to a child under one year of age. Do not use cow's milk as the main drink for a child under one year of age. If you are at risk of food allergies or have specific health problems, seek medical advice.

12. Child Vaccination and Regular Health Check-ups

Vaccination and regular health check-ups are important for the healthy growth and development of the child.

- Give the prescribed vaccinations on time after birth.
- Follow the schedule of the National Immunization Program of India.
- Measure the child's weight, length or height and head circumference as needed.
- Monitor the development of the child's vision, hearing, language and movement.
- Seek medical advice if you are sick or if there are unusual changes in eating and sleeping habits.
- Save the vaccination card and health check-up records.

13. What signs should you look out for if your child is developing late?

Not all children develop at the same pace. However, if you notice any of these signs, you should seek advice from a pediatrician without delay.

- Not responding to loud noises or familiar voices.
- Showing little interest in making eye contact.
- Not smiling, making sounds, or acquiring communication skills appropriate for your age.
- Having significant difficulty holding your head up, sitting, or walking.
- Difficulty understanding familiar words or simple instructions.
- Having significant delays in language development appropriate for your age.
- Losing skills you previously had.

Remember: It is important to get a doctor's evaluation right away if you lose a skill you previously learned. Not all signs mean a serious problem, but getting help early can help your child's development.

14. Important advice for parents

1. Give your child time every day and talk to him/her.
2. Create opportunities for play and learning according to the child's age.
3. Feed your child nutritious food and ensure adequate sleep.
4. Get your child vaccinated and have regular health check-ups.
5. Do not compare your child with others.
6. Help your child patiently without scolding him/her for his/her mistakes or slowness.
7. Keep the home environment safe to protect your child from accidents.
8. If you have any doubts about your child's development, do not self-diagnose the disease and seek medical advice.

Conclusion

Baby Growth and Development is an important process in a child's life. From birth to the age of five, a child's body, brain, language, thinking and social skills gradually develop. Proper nutrition, adequate sleep, a safe environment, regular health check-ups and parental love help in the healthy development of a child.

Every child's development pace is different. So monitor your child's progress regularly and consult a pediatrician if you have any concerns.

Special Note: This article is intended for general educational information. It is not a substitute for personal medical advice.