Normal Newborn Development and Behavior

What to expect in the first four months

Over the course of the next days, weeks, and months, your newborn will undergo quite a few changes in his development and behavior. It is the goal of this handout to prepare you as much as possible for the times ahead so you can be well equipped to handle these (sometimes surprising!) changes with confidence and peace of mind. Because all babies grow and develop at their own individual paces, keep in mind that your baby’s growth will look slightly different from your friend’s baby. If you have any concerns or questions about your baby’s development, don’t hesitate to contact your midwife, doctor, or doula for help.

First Day

For the first hour or so after birth, your baby will be alert and intent on finding your breast and learning to latch on to feed. He will begin to bond with you and can grasp your finger tightly. He will also love gazing at your face as you hold him in your arms. Though he cannot see very far, he can see about 18 inches in distance, which amazingly is the distance from his eyes to your face. You are going to be the first face he sees, studies, and grows to love.

When your baby is born, his appearance may be different than what you were expecting. His head may be molded from being squeezed through the birth canal. Over the next 24 hours or so, your baby’s skull bones will shift back into place. He may be covered in amniotic fluid, blood, a white, cheesy-looking substance called vernix, and fine body hairs called lanugo. This is especially true if he was born prematurely. In addition, his appearance may be slightly blue and mottled immediately after birth, and he may tend to curl in the fetal position. All of these things are very normal and will fade over time.
Your baby is born with several instincts, one of which is the ability to “step” or “crawl.” This crawling reflex, which developed around the 28th week of pregnancy and will disappear when your baby is about 6 weeks old, is very important in helping your baby move toward your breast all on his own right after birth. Another important newborn characteristic is his sense of smell and taste. Your baby is familiar with the smell and taste of amniotic fluid because he has been floating in it and swallowing it for the past 9 months. It is no accident that your breasts produce a smell that is very similar to amniotic fluid. Combined with the crawling reflex, his sense of smell enables your baby to find your breast and latch on usually within the first 50 minutes after birth.

Following his initial alertness after birth, your baby will become very sleepy. It is very common for babies to sleep for the majority of their first 24 hours of life outside the womb. Like you, your baby has just gone through the rigors of labor and will be tired. However, this will not stop him from waking up to feed. Especially during the first few days, your baby may nurse frequently in a pattern called “cluster feeding”, or he may alternate between sleeping and eating every 2 to 3 hours. Cluster feeding occurs when he feeds for 20 minutes or so, seems satisfied, then wants to nurse again soon after. While this pattern may be more annoying for you, it is very normal. It is simply a sign that your baby is growing and developing rapidly, and needs to eat more frequently to supply those needs. Remember, your baby’s stomach about the size of a cherry at birth. This means that he will need to drink little amounts frequently to fill his little stomach and fuel his growth. As he starts drinking your colostrum, your baby will produce his first bowel movement, a sticky, tar-like substance called meconium.

First Week

During the first 3 to 4 days after birth, your baby may lose up to 10% of his initial birth weight. This is primarily due to the loss of excess fluid from birth and is normal. By about day 7, he should be close to his birth weight again and will continue to gain about ¾ of an ounce each day after that.
Between day 2 and 6, your baby will continue to pass what is left of the meconium mixed with some milk. This turns the stools a spinach-green or yellow-green color. After day 6, your baby will have stools that are green, yellow or even brown. Some even look mustard-yellow. They can be formed or loose. If you feed your baby formula, you can expect up to 4 stools a day, but sometimes less than that. If your baby is breastfed, expect about 3 or 4 very runny stools a day.

Up until about day 5, your baby should produce enough urine to fill the number of diapers that corresponds to that day (i.e. Day 2 has 2 wet diapers, day 3 has 3 wet diapers, day 4 has 4 wet diapers, etc.). As your milk comes in more fully toward the end of the week, your baby will start producing urine even more abundantly.

Here are some milestones your baby will reach:

- He will have a spontaneous or reflexive smile, have equal movements of the arms and legs on both sides of his body, and briefly lift his head when he lies on his tummy.
- If you are breastfeeding your baby, he will eat between 8 and 12 times each day and at least a couple times during the night. If you are feeding him with formula, he will probably eat about every 2 to 3 hours.
- Newborn babies are very sleepy! It is not unusual for them to sleep between 16 and 18 hours every day and to wake up only for feedings.
- Your baby is working at fine-tuning his skills such as suckling, digesting, and establishing strong immune and digestive systems that are separate from yours through the growth of good bacteria in his gut.
- You may notice your baby has a strange breathing pattern during the first week or so. His breathing may be irregular, with episodes in which he stops breathing. Irregular breathing is normal in newborns and should not concern you unless he is turning blue around his mouth or on his torso.

**Week 2**

During the second week of life after birth, your baby will begin his first big growth spurt and will most likely reach his initial birth weight around day 10, even if he lost some during the first week. Sometimes it will seem as if he
grew right out of his sleeper in the middle of the night! This growth spurt is hard work! Your baby may be a little more fussy than usual, nap for longer periods of time, and eat more. Although he will likely sleep for about 18 hours each day, he will be much more alert during the times when he is awake, and he will stay awake for longer periods of time. Because of this, you may notice that your baby’s eyes appear to cross or roll back in his head. This is normal, so don’t be alarmed.

While still growing, your baby’s head may begin to appear smaller at the start of week 2, simply because any swelling or molding from birth will have faded by now.

During week 2, your baby’s umbilical cord stump will fall off (if it hasn’t already). This means that you may now bathe your baby!

Here are some highlights that you may notice during week 2:

- New birth marks may appear
- Your baby will be able to hear and respond to loud noises.
- Your baby can gaze and focus better on your face and other close-up objects.
- Your baby can lift up his head briefly, especially if laid on his stomach

**Week 3**

Your baby is getting stronger and more even more alert during the 3rd week after birth. He can lift his head up for a few seconds and may even turn it side to side, especially to follow you as you move away or around the room.

Your little one will love to watch you and may look like he is carefully studying your facial expressions or listening to you chat. Although he cannot understand what you are saying yet, speaking to him out loud is important for language development.

As he continues to grow this week, you may notice that he is a little more fussy than last week, especially in the evenings. Week 3 is a common time for colic to appear, if it does at all. There could be periods of crying that last two to three hours per day, especially at night. If your baby is displaying signs of excessive spit-up, is projectile vomiting, has blood in his stools, is not gaining weight, or is refusing to eat, you should seek medical attention.
If you have a baby girl, you may have noticed the occasional vaginal discharge during diaper changes or bath time in the past few weeks. It can look clear, white, or blood-tinged in appearance and although it may be alarming at first, it is normal and is due to your hormones. This discharge should dissipate during week 3. Your hormones may also cause your baby’s breasts to swell somewhat. This too is normal and should fade around the same time.

Here are some highlights for week 3:

- Your baby still sleeps between 16 and 18 hours each day.
- Your baby gains about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an ounce each day and 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 inches in length by the end of the month.
- Your baby loves being snuggled in your arms and will adjust his posture toward you as you hold him.
- Your baby is gaining more muscle! This means that his movements will be less jerky and more graceful.

**Week 4**

Have you noticed your baby starting to use his vocal cords for things other than crying? That’s right! He is starting to coo and make “ahh” sounds as he tries to mimic sounds that you make.

He is getting better at turning his head from side to side and listening intently.

Typically, at this age, your baby will still eat about eight to 12 times per 24 hours, continue to soak at least six diapers a day, and have one to three dirty diapers per day as well. Most 4 week-old babies still sleep between 16 and 18 hours every 24 hours and will take several naps throughout the day. Although you will still need to feed him during the night, he will sleep for one or two longer stretches of time.

A fun development during week 4 is that your baby gets excited by familiar sounds and faces, especially those belonging to you or your partner.

If your baby shows signs of reflux (choking during feedings, refusing feedings, excessive spitting up after feedings, back-arching during or right after feedings, chronic cough, and hoarse voice or cry), speak to your doctor or midwife.
**Second Month**

In the second month, your baby gains more control over his body. He can hold his head a little steadier while lying on his tummy or being held upright. While on his belly, he can lift his head and may even push up with his arms.

His eyesight is getting better, which brings with it more awareness of his own body as well as his surroundings. He will most likely find and bring his hands to his mouth to suck on them.

Between 6 weeks and 3 months of age, your baby's posterior fontanelle (the soft spot on the back of your baby's head) should close.

While your baby's sleeping patterns are still changing by 2 months, they are slowly becoming more established. While your baby will stay awake for longer periods of time, he will still nap between 2 and 4 times during the day and wake up at least 1 to 2 times during the night. This is especially true for breastfed babies, who generally need to eat every 3 hours or so.

Between 4 and 6 weeks, your baby will go through a growth spurt. During this time, his routine may be disrupted, he may become more fussy, and you may notice that he is “cluster feeding” again. This occurs during every growth spurt, and is normal.

At this point, your baby should be able to:

- Have developed distinct cries to indicate hunger, pain, or tiredness
- Smile in response to being talked to, played with, or smiled at
- Turn his attention to whoever is speaking
- Have good head control when held in a sitting position
- Be alert to new sounds
- Focus on and track faces and objects from side to side
- Uncurl his fists throughout the day
Third Month

This month marks a very exciting time as you move out of the “fourth trimester” at 12 weeks. By this point, your baby has gained more than 30 percent of their initial body weight and increased by 20 percent in body length.

Besides bestowing sweet smiles and coos on you, your baby may now be laughing, chuckling, and babbling in long chains. During this month, your baby will become more interactive and may try to bat at or suck on toys. He may also start sucking on his thumb, hand, or fingers.

Your baby will stretch and kick while lying down, which helps him develop his leg muscles. Another fun development is that he will open and close his fists and reach for intriguing objects.

Say goodbye to your relatively stationary baby! Around week 15, your little one may start to roll over—either from front to back or from back to front.

Your baby will also go through another growth spurt during the 3rd month, which means...more cluster feeding!

Fourth Month

By four months of age, your little one will have doubled their birth weights (or more) and will be sleeping more solidly and for longer stretches at night. However, expect a regression to more disruptive habits and more cluster feeding during this month as your baby experiences another growth spurt!

He will still nurse/feed between 6 and 8 times each day, especially if you are breastfeeding him. However, around the 4 month mark, he may express some interest in tasting (or playing with!) bits of your food. Go with your baby’s cues and interests with regards to food and try not to introduce solids sooner than he wants to. It is better to wait than risk introducing solids too early and interfering with his desire for breastmilk.

At 4 months of age, your baby may hit the following milestones:

- Sits up with support
- Bears some weight when standing on a hard surface
- Holds a rattle or other toy
- LOVES playing peek-a-boo
- Holds up his head and chest during tummy time
- Pushes up to elbows when laying on stomach
- Coordinates seeing and movement—spotting something they want, then reaching for it
- Follows objects moving from side to side with eyes
- Learns cause and effect
- Starts to figure out how things work
- Eyesight clarity improves, causing baby to enjoy looking at more patterns, shapes, and colors
- Smiles spontaneously, most often at people
- Enjoys playing and may react with negative emotion, such as crying, if playing stops
- Mimics facial expressions, such as smiling or frowning
- Babbles and may try to mimic language, like cooing
- Recognizes people from a distance