



What are babies like?

At the start, it may seem a bit scary to look after a newborn baby. It can help if you understand some of the physical things about babies.

- * Babies do things automatically with their bodies. They suck things that are put in their mouth, they hold on tight to things in their hand and if they are upset they fling their arms out and throw their heads back.
- * Babies' heads can sometimes be uneven in shape after birth or because of the way they sleep. Don't worry about this – it will go away as your baby grows.
- * The 'soft spot' (fontanelle) on top of a baby's head is there so the baby fits through the birth passage more easily. This spot will close over in the baby's first year or so. The skin over the soft spot is strong and you can't hurt your baby by gently washing or brushing his head. Sometimes the fontanelle swells when the baby is crying and goes flat when the crying stops.
- * Cradle cap is crusty scales on the head. Rub it with olive oil or petroleum jelly to soften it one evening and wash it off the next day. Gently lift off the scales with a fine-toothed comb or fingernail. See your doctor if it does not get better within a week.
- * Some babies have sticky eyes due to a blocked tear duct. Ask your doctor how to manage this.
- * Some babies have little white lumps like tiny pearls in their mouth, especially on the gums. These are normal and go away when the baby grows.
- * Some babies spit up a little milk after feeds. If they are growing well and happy this is nothing to worry about. If your baby is bringing up milk in big spurts much of the time, see your doctor. If your baby is not putting on weight or is miserable a lot of the time, talk to your doctor or child health nurse.
- * Lots of babies have hiccups after feeds.
- * Babies are often born with puffy genitals and breasts (sometimes even 'milk' comes from the breasts). This is from the mother's hormones and it won't last long.
- * Most babies have spots on their faces and often on parts of the body in the first few weeks, which is a reaction to their skin being exposed to air rather than fluid in the womb. Sometimes the spots come when the baby gets hot or has been lying on their side. If they go away within an hour or so they are probably this kind of spot. It's not acne and does not need any treatment.
- * Very young breastfed babies do several 'poo's' a day. Even if baby seems to be pushing hard, the poo is usually very soft. After a few weeks baby may only have a poo every few days and it will still be soft.
- * Bottle fed babies might have firmer poods.
- * Babies sometimes get a lump underneath their belly button. It may swell if the baby is crying. This is a small gap in the 'tummy' muscle and nearly always goes away over time. It usually does not cause health problems or need treatment.
- * Babies usually start to get teeth at about six months and usually have all their baby teeth by the time they are three years old. Look after your baby's teeth by brushing them gently and don't give them bottles of juice or milk at bedtime. The sugars in these drinks stay in the mouth and can cause decay.
- * Some babies don't have any teeth until they are one year old. Occasionally a baby is born with a tooth.

If you have any questions or are concerned about your baby's health, see your doctor or talk to an early childhood nurse.

What your baby *can do*

All babies are different. While babies usually develop in similar ways, your baby might do things faster, slower or differently from other babies and this is usually fine. If your baby is doing things much more slowly or not doing some things at all, it is a good idea to check with your doctor to make sure that all is going well.

Here are some of the things your baby will probably be able to do.

Six or seven weeks

He can smile at you when you smile at him.



two months

She can hold up her head when you are holding her upright and lift her head up if she is lying on her tummy.



Three months

She will enjoy hitting toys that make a noise and she can hold a rattle for a short time.



Seven months

He will be sitting up and might be starting to crawl.



Four months

He may be able to roll from his front to his back, but it may be another couple of months, or more, before he can roll from his back to his front.



Nine months

Many babies can pull themselves up to stand. Some babies take longer. It takes another two or three months or so before she can stand without holding onto something and then a few more weeks before she can actually walk.



Twelve months

Babies will 'talk' to you in their own language and may say one or two clear words – probably one of them will be "No!". Your baby will be able to hold something between her thumb and forefinger and play little games like wave goodbye and 'pat-a-cake'.



What your baby can see, hear, taste and feel

Newborn babies can see, hear, taste, smell and feel. They can move their arms and legs (though they cannot control the movements) and they can suck! They let you know how they are feeling and what they need by crying. Usually when a newborn cries, the best thing to check is if they are hungry or need their nappy changed and if they need to be held and comforted by you.

Seeing

- ✿ Your baby can see quite well at birth, especially things that are close.
- ✿ **She will be able to see your face and will soon learn to recognise you.**
- ✿ She will be able to see objects that are further away, but they will be blurred. Her distance vision will develop over the next few months.
- ✿ Babies can see different colours, but as they do not understand colours they may like simple shapes, each in one colour.
- ✿ In the first few weeks, a baby's eyes often cross, or wander in different directions some of the time.
- ✿ By the age of three months the eyes should be lined up so that they both look at the same object.
- ✿ If a young baby's eyes are turned in or out most of the time, or if a baby over three months old has turned eyes, the baby needs to have her eyes checked.
- ✿ Some babies and young children have turned eyes some of the time (more often when they are tired or unwell). These babies should also have their eyes checked.
- ✿ Babies' eyes may change colour and you may not know what colour their eyes will be for several months.

Hearing

- ✿ Your baby has been hearing since well before birth. She is familiar with your voice and the sounds of your household.
- ✿ **Soft noises often help calm babies while sudden, loud noises startle them.**
- ✿ Babies seem to like high voices and animated faces.
- ✿ Your baby can hear voices, but she cannot understand any words yet. Talking to your baby from the time that she is born will help her start to

understand that sounds make words and have meaning.

- ✿ Listen to your baby's noises and sounds and copy them. When you copy your baby it is like saying "I can hear you" and a way for you start to teach your baby to talk.

Smell and taste

- ✿ Babies are born with senses of smell and taste. They know the smell and taste of their mother's milk, and they may refuse to drink if the milk tastes different.
- ✿ Babies can tell different tastes such as salty, sweet, sour and bitter.
- ✿ They don't like unpleasant tastes such as some medicines.
- ✿ They do not need salt or sugar on their foods when they start eating solids.

✿ **Babies should never, ever be given any drugs or medications before checking with your doctor.**

Feeling

- ✿ Babies are sensitive to touch and can feel pain from the time they are born.
- ✿ Touch your baby in a gentle, caring way and they will feel loved and cared for – and settle better.
- ✿ Nappy rash is very painful for babies, and they will be quite unsettled.

Moving

- ✿ Most of a baby's movements are random and the baby is not able to control them at first. These are called reflexes.
- ✿ Babies arms stretch out and their backs arch and their heads go back – this is the 'startle' reflex.
- ✿ Babies also grip things that are put in their hands – this is the grasp reflex. These reflexes decrease over the first few months as they get more conscious control of their movements.

- ✿ When something touches her face she will turn towards it (the rooting reflex) and she will suck on it. Sucking is a reflex too; your baby will suck on things that are put into her mouth. Some babies will even be sucking their thumbs when they are newborns. Babies need to suck so that they can survive.

- ✿ Babies also have a 'tongue thrust' reflex. When something is placed in their mouth, they will, in the early months, tend to push it out using their tongue. This often happens when they start on solids. It does not mean that they don't like the taste of the food; it is because they need to learn to control their tongue.

✿ **Most babies will start to smile by the time they are around six weeks old, and will be able to move their head a little.**

Reading

Reading to your baby a few minutes a day will help them grow and develop. Babies love being read to as they get to feel safe and close to you – they hear your voice and can start to look at pictures.

Quick tips

- ✿ **Every baby is different – even in the same family.**
- ✿ **Watch and learn from your own baby.**
- ✿ **Babies grow and learn faster than they will at any other stage of life.**
- ✿ **Take time to enjoy the new things your baby is learning and doing.**
- ✿ **Always ask for help if you have any worries about your baby – check out the 'where to get help' section.**