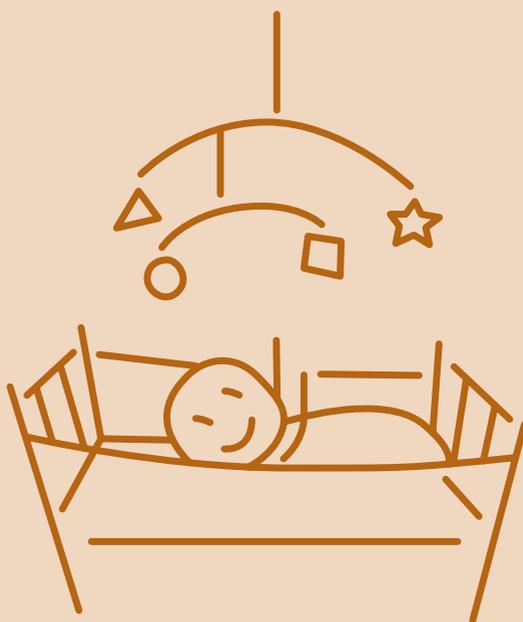


# child development 3-6 months



Babies between three and six months old can be very enjoyable. They have come a long way in the first three months and they are usually very social beings who delight in being with you. Parents have usually learned enough of their baby's ways and messages to get their responses right for most of the time. Early troubles such as feeding difficulties and crying have often settled down.

## Social and emotional development

- By three or four months old your baby is beginning to get a bit of an idea about being in the world and you are getting to know each other.
- She will be making eye contact with you and you will be smiling at each other. She will be able to 'read' some of your expressions and she will smile when you show you are happy and may look worried if you look cross or tired.
- She has learnt that you are the person (or one of the people) who comes a lot of the time to meet her needs but she does not yet 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 seven 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 getting the idea that relationships are rewarding and also that she is valuable, and this is an important basis for her relationship with you and other people as well as her own self esteem.

- At this stage she is often happy to smile and interact with strangers because she is getting so much pleasure from smiling and interacting with you.
- You and she will be having 'conversations' with each other, and she will be getting 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 – when your baby has too much excitement she may start to cry and need to be calmed down.

### **At four months your baby:**

- smiles lots
- 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
- clearly shows enjoyment at being bathed, talked to, etc.

## **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 will spend time looking carefully at his hands and touching and looking at his feet, getting the idea that it feels from the outside as well as the inside and that it's all attached.
- He will grasp at objects in front of him now and you will need to put stronger mobiles above his cot and pram/stroller.
- His body might be hard for him to control but it does interesting things when he can!

It is very important for your baby to spend time on his tummy on the floor kicking his legs and waving his arms as if he is about to swim off at any moment. This strengthens his back and helps him to begin to learn how to crawl. He will get frustrated after a while with not being able to hold his head up for a long time or move forward – but give him as long as he can tolerate.

**Note:** Do not leave a baby on his tummy when he sleeps. Sleeping on the tummy increases the risk of Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI).

Put interesting things on the floor near him so he wants to try to move towards them when he is ready. He will take everything to his mouth – that's his way of exploring the shape and texture of objects. Rattles, plastic spoons and toys – anything smooth, small enough to hold but too large to swallow and coloured will be good objects for him to discover the nature of matter.

### **Your baby:**

- rolls over from front to back at about four to six months
- is able to lift head and chest when on his tummy by four months
- when on tummy will lift and wave his arms and legs about
- begins to discover hands belong to him and plays with fingers about three to four months
- grabs and plays with his toes when lying on his back about four to five months
- is able to hold objects for brief periods at three to four months
- brings toys and objects to mouth if put in his hand

- swipes at dangling objects at three to four months, but usually misses
- sits up when being held by his hands but topples over if left in sitting position
- grabs for a toy such as a block or rattle at around five months
- is able to support own weight when stood on feet (don't do this too often as it does not mean he is ready to walk)
- when being held grabs at hair, spectacles and other objects like badges or chains.

## Hearing and seeing

Your baby is starting to understand the world around her and the incoming signals.

- Her eye muscles work well and she can follow you with her eyes, move from looking at one object to another and focus on small objects.
- If she can she will check what she sees by grasping and mouthing the object. 'Yes', she thinks, 'that's round and smooth and mum keeps saying the word 'spoon' – this 'spoon' thing has existence in the world as an object in its own right.
- Her exploring is important, so give her time to look properly at objects and try to help her be comfortable so she can concentrate on them.
- Sounds as well as sights are becoming familiar and defined – your baby will recognise voices and turn her head towards them.

## Speech and language

Long before they can speak, babies are listening to their parents and carers. They begin to make little noises and sounds which come before speech. If parents and carers imitate these they are 'talking' to the baby.

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

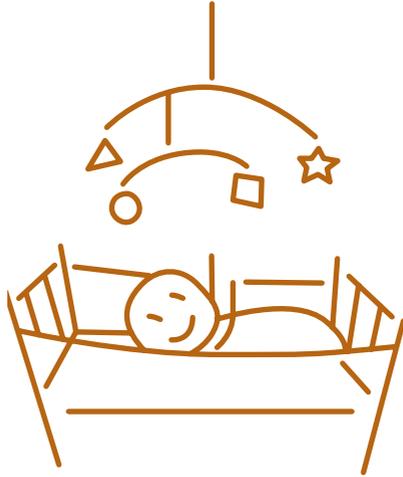
- Show him your tongue and practise simple sounds together – 'maa, daa' are good ones to begin with. He will be very interested in how your mouth works and how the sound comes out.
- When he makes a sound, repeat it to him so he knows what sound he has made. This also starts a conversation game between 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 extremely important, not just because you are teaching him to talk but also because he is getting the feeling of a 'him' and a 'you' and a joining in the middle through language. This is a new and complicated concept and is the basis for all his relationships throughout his life.

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

### **By three to six months, your baby usually:**

- coos and gurgles with pleasure
- begins babbling and then listening at around three to four months
- 'talks' to toys at around five to six months
- turns head to sound.



## Activities for a three to six month old child

- 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.
- Place her on the floor in a safe place on her tummy for short periods to play.
- Place her on the floor without a nappy to allow her the freedom to kick.
- Provide her with bright objects to look at and place some within reaching distance so that she can accidentally touch them initially and then try to touch them again.
- Provide her with a variety of things to do and either change what she is looking at or move her to a different spot so she has something else to look at.
- Place colourful toys nearby for her to touch / try to touch, look at and hit.

## **ALERT!**

These are very important months. Don't hesitate to get help from 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 together as well as you would like.

## **SAFETY!**

- Your baby can now grasp some small objects and put them in her mouth, which means that she may swallow them or they may cause her to choke.
- Babies often roll over by the time they are four or five months old and can get into danger quickly. Make sure that she is not left alone unless she is in a safe place.

## **Summary**

### **Social emotional:**

- laughs aloud by about three months (between two to four months)
- enjoys being played with (laughs, kicks) by four months.

### **Talk with your doctor or nurse if:**

- your baby shows no obvious pleasure in interacting with people
- your baby is not making eye contact with people.

## **Motor skills, vision and hearing:**

- rolls over around five months (between four to six months)
- lifts head and chest when laying on her tummy by four months
- looks at hands and plays with own fingers, about three months.
- can hold an object by three to four months
- starts being able to chew around five to six months
- watches activities of those around
- makes eye contact
- likes looking at people and bright objects.

## **Talk with your doctor or nurse if:**

- he seems more floppy or stiff than other babies
- he is not opening and closing his hands and fingers
- his arms and legs are held in one position most of the time
- he is not looking around at objects and people.

## **Daily activities:**

- has more or less a routine for the day
- begins to react to familiar situations by smiling, cooing and excited movements
- parents able to say whether the baby 'enjoys' things, like baths or being undressed
- recognises the breast or bottle, and makes movements showing pleasure.

## **Talk with your doctor or nurse if:**

- it is still hard to help her settle
- she is not gaining weight well.

## Thinking and understanding:

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

### Talk with your doctor or nurse if:

- she does not seem to recognise mother or others
- she does not seem interested in things around her.

## Speech and language:

- turns head to a talking person by five months
- searches for a sound (turns head) by four months
- makes lots of little sounds
- takes turns when 'talking' with parents.

### Talk with your doctor or nurse if:

- he does not react
- not looking to find where sounds are coming from (eyes only at this age)
- not making sounds.

**Note:** Children are different and may develop at different rates. So if your child does not do all the things in this topic, it may be because your child is working on some different area of his learning and development at present. However, children usually follow the same pattern of development, and it is good to have reassurance that your child is developing normally in their own unique way.

If your child is very different from other children, if you are worried about your child's development or if it seems to go backwards, you should talk with a health professional about your concerns. If there is a problem, getting help and ideas early will help. Remember that what matters is to support them on moving forward from where they are now.

## For more information contact:

- Local community child health nurse  
See inside your baby's purple 'All About Me' book  
Look in the phone directory under 'Child Health Centres'  
Visit [www.healthywa.wa.gov.au](http://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au)
  
- Local family doctor
  
- Ngala Helpline  
8:00am–8:00pm 7 days a week  
Telephone (08) 9368 9368  
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 111 546\*  
[www.ngala.com.au](http://www.ngala.com.au)
  
- Parenting WA Line  
Freecall 1800 654 432\* (24 hour service)  
[www.dlhc.wa.gov.au/parents](http://www.dlhc.wa.gov.au/parents)
  
- Raising Children Network  
[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)
  
- Kidsafe WA  
8:30am–5:00pm (Monday to Friday)  
Telephone (08) 9340 8509  
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 802 244\*  
[www.kidsafewa.com.au](http://www.kidsafewa.com.au)
  
- SIDS & Kids  
9:00am–5:00pm (Monday to Friday)  
Telephone (08) 9474 3544  
Outside metro area – Freecall 1800 199 466\*  
[www.sidsandkidswa.org](http://www.sidsandkidswa.org)

\*Calls made from a mobile may be charged at a timed rate.

This topic may use 'he' and 'she' in turn - please change to suit your child's sex.

**This information, along with other child health information, is available in electronic format at [www.healthywa.wa.gov.au](http://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au)**

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability. Please contact [childcommunity@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:childcommunity@health.wa.gov.au)

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