



A Guide to Development: From Birth to 18 Months

Your baby will develop in their own unique way and at their own pace. Your child's brain develops rapidly during the first three years of life. The interactions they have with the people and the world around them at this time play an important part in their development now and in the future.

The information on this page will give you a general idea of the changes you can expect, but you shouldn't worry if your child takes a slightly different course.

Big muscles and Movement skills

You might hear these referred to as 'gross motor skills'.

Age (in months)	Developmental Overview	What You Can Do
0 - 6	<p>By three months, most babies can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - raise their head and chest when lying on their stomach - keep their head in the middle when lying on their back. <p>By six months, most babies :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - are learning to roll both ways (front to back, back to front) - can grasp feet with hands - can support their weight on their legs (when held) - are beginning to develop some mobility on their tummy. 	<p>You can help by changing your baby's position frequently. Do not leave them in supported seating for too long so they get lots of opportunity to practice movements. Play with your baby on the floor, allow them to move about and encourage them to roll, be on their tummy and sit with support.</p> <p>Give your baby regular 'tummy time'. This helps them learn about movement and develop the skills to roll over, sit and crawl. You can do this from birth.</p> <p>Start off with a few minutes of tummy time twice a day and build up from there as they get older. You can always begin with laying them across your legs or on your chest. Being face-to-face with your baby or placing a mirror or brightly coloured toy in front will also help.</p> <p>Please remember, you should always supervise your baby when they are on their tummy and always lay your baby down to sleep on their back.</p>
6 - 12	<p>By nine months, most babies can sit unsupported and play with toys. They will probably be pivoting round on their tummy to get into a crawling position. They may be crawling, although some will choose to move around by bottom shuffling.</p> <p>By 12 months, babies can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - get from sitting to lying on their tummy or to crawling - get from lying to sitting by themselves - pull themselves up to stand and lower themselves to the floor in a controlled way - walk holding on to furniture (and may stand and walk independently). 	<p>Continue to give babies lots of time on the floor, lying on both their back and their tummy.</p> <p>Give your child lots of opportunities to move about and do not restrict their movement for prolonged periods of time. This is an exciting time as they begin to explore their environment with a degree of independence. But as they become more mobile, make sure dangerous objects are out of reach.</p> <p>Baby walkers are not recommended because evidence has shown that children are at greater risk of accidents and they can delay the achievement of motor milestones.</p>

12 - 18	<p>By 18 months, most babies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - can walk alone with feet wide apart, but frequently fall and bump into furniture - can get to standing unaided - can crawl up stairs and may attempt to step up them - enjoy walking with push-along toys such as a brick trolley. 	<p>Continue to give your child lots of opportunities to develop their movement skills around the house, ensuring it is free from hazards!</p> <p>Show your child how to get down from furniture and use the stairs safely. Push and pull toys can help develop balance and large, soft balls are great for rolling, throwing and kicking. You can also use balloons and scarves for throwing and catching- as these are slower moving and are easier to catch.</p>
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Hand and finger skills

You might hear these referred to as 'fine motor skills'.

Age (in months)	Developmental Overview	What You Can Do
0 - 6	<p>By three months most babies can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - open and close their hands - bring their hand to their mouth - swipe at dangling objects with hands. <p>By six months, most babies can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - begin to grasp objects - reach with one hand at a time - shake and bang toys placed in their hands - use their hand to 'rake' objects. 	<p>Give your child toys that stimulate a variety of senses, such as musical mobiles, rattles with different textures and comforters with different materials and bright colours. As your baby develops they will try to reach for these and explore them with their hands.</p> <p>From three months, let your baby grasp your fingers as you pull them up into sitting. Provide objects to see, hear, and grasp, for example, rattles.</p>
6 - 12	<p>Between six and 12 months babies learn to let go with hands, tend to put everything in their mouth, begin to feed themselves with their fingers and can hold a lidded cup. They explore objects in many different ways, often shaking, banging, throwing and dropping.</p> <p>By 12 months, most babies can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use a pincer grasp with their thumb and index finger - bang two objects together - put objects into a container and take them out - let go of objects voluntarily - poke things with their index finger. 	<p>Let your baby play at "dropping things", since this helps in understanding the world.</p> <p>From about nine months, encourage your baby to do things with a pincer grasp (holding things between the tips of their thumb and index finger) such as picking up raisins out of a small container.</p> <p>Give your baby lots of opportunity to use their hands and fingers, such as eating finger foods, playing with water, sand and finger paints. Encourage them to take part in action songs, using their hands, such as Incy Wincy Spider and Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.</p>
12 - 18	<p>By 18 months, most infants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - are curious and exploring – they may like to poke fingers in holes, and put things in and take things out of cupboards or containers - can stack two or three blocks - make marks on paper with crayons - can pull off shoes, socks, and gloves - can feed themselves with a spoon. 	<p>Encourage your child to do things that require two hands, where one hand 'holds' and the other 'does' such as mixing in a bowl, building blocks, unscrewing the tops of plastic bottles and building with construction toys like Duplo. These are good for coordination and help the child decide which is their dominant hand.</p> <p>Give your child finger foods such as raisins and small pieces of rusk and encourage them to feed themselves using a spoon (see feeding for more advice on this). Mealtimes may be messy!</p>

Making sense of what you're looking at

You might hear this referred to as 'visual perception'.

Age (in months)	Developmental Overview	What You Can Do
0 - 6	During the first six months, your baby will start to develop control of their eye movements and will watch faces intently. By six months, most babies can: - follow moving objects - recognise familiar people and objects at a distance.	Offer your baby interesting things to look at, such as mobiles and bright colours. From three months, slowly move objects in front of your baby's face, about 40 cm away, for them to watch and track with their eyes.
6 - 12	By 12 months, most babies: - can find objects that have been hidden - will look at the correct picture in a book when it is named, such as 'where is the duck?'	Help your baby to learn concepts such as in, on, and under by putting items in, on and under another toy and using these words in play. For example 'look, the block is in the cup'.
12 - 18	By 18 months, most infants: - can point to and name common body parts and familiar objects - recognise basic shapes and colours - will point at the correct picture in a book when it is named.	Teach your child the names of body parts and familiar objects. Provide toys and play games involving different colours and shapes, pots, pans, boxes and balls. Introduce shape sorters and simple puzzles (2 – 3 pieces).

Social and emotional development

During their first year, the most important social and emotional development for babies is to build feelings of safety, security and trust in other people. These relationships, particularly with their parents and carers, help the baby to develop mentally, physically and emotionally.

Trust – Babies are working very hard to understand the world around them. Having adults who are consistently available to them will help them to develop trust.

Emotional needs – Babies thrive when their emotional needs are met and they find comfort in faces, touch and 'snuggling in'. Babies are interested in people and enjoy the company of others from birth. They show a range of emotions and, from about seven months, fear, anger and pain show more strongly.

Separation anxiety – Babies have a tendency to become more 'clingy' at around eight to ten months. They may seem nervous of strangers and cry more when their parent or carer leaves the room. This is often referred to as 'separation anxiety' and it comes and goes, usually peaking at around 18 months. This is a key time for babies to learn about trust. They need those short separations from their parent or carer in order to learn that they do always come back. It is not until about 18 to 24 months that toddlers can carry a picture of their loved ones in their mind.

From 12 to 18 months, children show intense affection for parents, carers and other familiar people. Toddlers become more aware of themselves and their ability to make things happen.

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

Babies and toddlers have a short attention span and their behaviour is usually best managed by distracting them.

FURTHER LINKS – [feeding and mealtimes](#) and [getting dressed](#).