

What's Up? Your Baby's Development

6-Month Visit



This is a time of great fun for parents as they watch their babies become eager explorers who are thrilled to discover that they can make things happen. A 6-month-old may know, *When I smile, mommy smiles back!* An 8-month-old might lift her arms to tell her dad, *I want you to pick me up. How is your baby making things happen?*

6–9 Months: What's on Your Mind

My 8-month-old used to love when my mother babysat, but now she sobs when I leave!

This sounds like *separation anxiety*. Starting at around 8 or 9 months old babies may become upset and fearful when separated from a loved one. This happens because babies are beginning to understand that people still exist even when they can't see them. So they naturally protest to try to make their special person stay. To help your baby adjust to separations, read stories about saying good-bye (such as *Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell). And use a good-bye routine with your baby each time you leave—like a song, a kiss, and a big wave. Routines help babies feel safe. To help your child make the transition to your mom, suggest that the three of you play with one of your child's favorite toys or books before you leave. Most important, be sure to say a real good-bye to your baby. Sneaking out makes babies worry that you may disappear at any time without warning. This makes separations even harder and can create feelings of mistrust.

What Your Baby Can Do

I am learning to think and solve problems.

- When a toy drops to the floor, I look to see where it went.
- I figure out how things work by copying what I see others do.

I can control my body.

- I am starting to pick up small objects using my thumb and other fingers.
- I can sit on my own, which helps me explore in new ways.
- I may crawl or scoot to get around. I might even pull up on furniture to stand.

I am working hard to communicate with you.

- I babble a lot. When someone talks to me, I might make sounds back.
- I use my voice to express feelings, such as joy and anger.
- I copy actions you make such as waving “bye-bye” and shaking my head “no-no.”

My personality is starting to show.

- I may love to meet new people or may need time to feel comfortable with someone I don't know yet.
- I may like lots of sound and activity, or I may prefer things to be quiet and calm.
- I may be very active or more interested in watching.

What You Can Do

Comment on what your baby does to make things happen.

“You used your voice to let me know you wanted to keep playing peek-a-boo.”

Let your baby explore interesting objects—such as a busy box with a window that pops open if your baby pushes a lever.

Begin letting your child practice picking up baby-safe foods such as slices of banana, if you'd like your child to learn to feed herself.

Give your baby time and space to move around on his own, while you supervise. This builds muscle strength and coordination.

Use words to describe your baby's feelings: “You are mad Daddy took away the crayon. You can chew on this rattle instead.”

If your baby is looking at something, point at it and explain: “That's a fan. It keeps us cool.”

Copy your baby's sounds and actions. If she waves, wave back and say “Hello!”

Notice how your baby likes to play and explore. Does he like to move or does he prefer to sit and watch the world around him?

See how your baby reacts to sounds, sights, and social activity. What does he seem to enjoy? What does he seem to dislike or get overwhelmed by?



Spotlight on Helping Your Baby Learn to Sleep Through the Night

By 6 months, many full-term, healthy babies are able to sleep through the night, for many it takes longer.¹ (Certainly check with your health care provider to be sure.) If you'd like your baby to learn this skill, it's important to be patient and consistent with how you handle bedtime and night-wakings. This helps your baby learn to soothe himself and go back to sleep more easily and quickly.

What It Means for You:

At this age, babies begin to look to loved ones for clues about how to feel about a situation. For example, when a new person comes to the house, a baby looks at his parents to see how they respond: *Are they smiling and happy? Is this person okay? Can I trust him?* To help your baby adjust when meeting new person, show with your own face, voice, and actions that the person is nice and trustworthy. *How have you seen your baby observe and react to your signals?*



As you use the HealthySteps handouts, remember that your child may develop skills faster or slower than indicated and still be growing just fine. Every child develops at her own pace—and your HealthySteps Specialist will be available to answer any questions you may have. Your family's cultural beliefs and values are also important factors that shape your child's development.

Did you know...

Your baby is watching and learning from you?

What You Can Do:

Use a bedtime routine. Loving and bedtime routines (such as bath, story, milk, teeth-cleaning, and then lullaby) help babies settle down and learn when it's time to go to sleep. (Just be sure not to leave a cup or bottle in the crib or bed.)

Look for patterns. When does your baby usually get hungry or tired? When is she usually ready to play? If you find patterns in your baby's sleep and activity levels, you can schedule activities—such as doctor's appointments or trips to the mall—when she is at her best.

Put baby to bed while he's sleepy but still awake. We all wake up to some degree during the night as we move

through different stages of sleep. If children are fed or comforted by a loved one to fall asleep, when they wake up in the middle of the night, they depend on that same kind of comfort to fall back to sleep. When you put your baby down sleepy but awake, he learns how to fall asleep on his own.

Plan for protests. Make a plan for what to do if your baby cries while she is learning to fall asleep. Some parents choose to check on their child several times until she falls asleep. Other parents say a clear goodnight and do not return until morning. (For some children, having their parents come in and out can make it harder for them to calm down and fall asleep.) There is not one "right" way to help babies learn to sleep through the night.

At this visit the pediatric team will measure your baby's length, weight, and head. They'll listen to your baby's heart and look at his eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Your baby will receive any needed immunizations. We will talk about your baby's development and routines like sleeping and eating. We'll also review safety guidelines. And, of course, we'll make time to discuss any questions or concerns you might have!

1. Henderson, J. M. T., France, K. G., Owens, J. L., & Blampied, N. M. (2010). Sleeping through the night: The consolidation of sleep across the first year of life. *Pediatrics* 126(5), e1081–e1087.