

## What's Up? Your Baby's Development

# 4-Month Visit



This time is all about parents and babies connecting more. Most babies are eating and sleeping more regularly. They are also responding more actively to parents and caregivers. Over the next few months, you will begin learning about your baby's preferences—what he likes and dislikes and how he prefers to sleep, eat, and play. *What are you learning about your little one?*

### 4–6 Months: What's on Your Mind

#### My 4-month-old hasn't rolled over yet but my sister's 3-month-old has. Should I worry?

There is a wide range of what is considered “normal” for learning new skills in the first 3 years. One baby may roll over at 3 months while another rolls at 6. If your child is making forward progress—working on moving her body in new ways—she is probably doing just fine. If you have any concerns, talk with your health care provider. In the meantime, lots of playtime on her back and belly will help her get ready to roll.

#### What Your Baby Can Do

##### I am learning to control my body.

- I push myself up to see the world around me. I roll to try to get closer to you or to an interesting toy or object.
- I can sit with help and hold my head steady.
- I may start to rock back and forth on my hands and knees to get ready to crawl so I can get moving and explore.

##### I use my hands and fingers to explore.

- I reach for and grasp objects and toys. I explore them with my fingers, hands, and mouth to figure out what they can do.

##### I communicate by using sounds, actions, and facial expressions.

- When you shake my rattle, I may smile and move my arms and legs to let you know I want to keep playing.
- I can make a few different sounds in response to your sounds—babbling, coos, and gurgles.

##### I am getting used to the world around me.

- I may be developing a more regular eating/sleeping schedule.
- I am starting to notice daily routines. When you turn the lights down I am learning it is time for sleep.

#### What You Can Do

##### Place your baby in different positions to help her develop new skills such as rolling, creeping, and crawling.

- Make sure she gets time on both her back and stomach.
- Help her sit with support. This allows her to explore in new ways.
- Be sure she is always put to sleep on her back.
- Place interesting objects just out of her reach to encourage her to roll and move toward them.

**Offer your baby toys to explore** that have different shapes, sizes, textures, and sounds. Show him ways to use these objects by shaking, banging, pushing, and dropping.

**Watch and respond to your baby's signals.** “You are smiling—I think you like looking in the mirror. Do you want to look at yourself again?”

**Have back-and-forth “conversations” with your baby.** When you reply to her babbles, she knows you care about what she is saying.

##### Create routines for your baby.

- Help him know it's time for sleep by doing the same things in the same order each night, such as bath, books, and then a lullaby.
- Sing a song that you are getting ready to feed your baby. When he hears it he'll know milk is coming. This may calm him and also helps him learn to wait.

*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 his 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.*



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## Spotlight on Language Learning

Babies are not just listeners—they are talkers, too. Beginning at about 2–3 months old, they begin to use their voices to coo, laugh, and squeal. Even young babies are learning the “rules” of conversation. As early as 3–4 months, babies will stay quiet while someone else is talking. They wait for silence, then babble, then wait for your response.<sup>1</sup> By about 6 months, babies begin to repeat certain sounds like *ba-ba-ba* or *da-da-da*. Around 1 year, they make the connection in their minds between a sound they make—*baba*—and the object it stands for—a bottle. After they make this link, your baby’s use of words will begin to grow!

## Did you know...

When parents and caregivers notice and respond sensitively to their babies’ signals, they are helping their children develop stronger thinking and social-emotional skills.<sup>2</sup>

### What You Can Do:

- **Talk to your baby.** Babies learn language when adults talk with them and respond to their babbles. Research shows that children who are talked to the most in the early years have the largest vocabularies later in life.<sup>3</sup>
- **Respond to your baby’s sounds.** When he babbles, take a moment to reply: “Do you like splashing in the tub? It’s a lot of fun, isn’t it!”
- **Listen to your baby’s babbles.** Respond to what you think she is “saying.” “You love the rattle. You’re telling me to shake it again.” This interaction helps your child feel understood, loved, and important, which builds confidence and language skills.
- **Watch your baby.** Babies tell us what they are thinking and feeling through facial expressions and body movements. When you see your baby reach for something, put his action into words: “You see me eating—you want to grab my spoon!”
- **Sing to your baby.** Singing lets children hear and, later, repeat words and phrases. It’s also a great way to have fun and bond with your baby.
- **Read to your baby.** Reading together at this age builds a love of books and helps your baby hear lots of different words. Both will help your baby learn to talk.
- **Tell stories to your baby.** Ask grandparents and other family members to share stories as a way to build family connections.

### What It Means for You:

Responding to your baby’s cries and meeting her needs is not spoiling her—it’s being a great parent. The following three steps can help you understand what your baby is telling you before she can talk:

1. **Watch and listen:** Look for patterns in his cries, sounds, facial expression, and body movements. For example, does your baby suck his fingers when he’s hungry?
2. **Understand:** Use your child’s signals to figure out what she needs or wants. For example, your baby may pull on her ear lobes when she is sleepy.
3. **Respond:** Use your baby’s cues to help you choose how to respond. You might take a break from playing when he arches his back and looks away because you know that means he’s overwhelmed. Keep in mind that you may have to try several different responses before you can figure out exactly what he needs.

*What are some of the patterns you have noticed in your baby’s behavior? How has this helped you understand her?*

*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 her 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. Berger, K. S., 2005. *The developing person through childhood and adolescence*. New York, NY: Worth Publishers

2. Eshel, N., Daelmans, B., Cabral de Mello, M., & Martines, J., (2006). Responsive parenting: Interventions and outcomes. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 84, 991–998. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2471/BLT.06.030163>

3. Hart, B., & Risley, T. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.