

Milestones measure and show progress. Your baby's journey toward crawling and walking has many important milestones along the way. The larger, more coordinated movements, called gross motor skills, are something that she'll learn to make with her arms, legs, neck, and entire body. And then watch out! Before you know it, your child will not only be walking, but she'll also be running, skipping, jumping, and so much more!

Don't be so focused on your baby's milestones that you forget to enjoy watching your baby grow up. You can expect your baby to be advanced in some milestones and behind in others. When a child reaches a milestone it is not as important as continual progression. Be careful not to compare your baby with other children. Your baby is an individual and the age at which children reach a particular milestone can range widely. The following development chart will help you understand what your baby might be capable of at each stage of his development.

Birth to 3 Months

A lot of your newborn's movements are reflexive, which are automatic, involuntary responses. For example, if a bug flies close to your eye, you blink. It's a response you can't control. A baby is born with certain reflexes that are meant to help them survive. Some of these reflexes include:

- **Startle reflex.** If a baby hears a loud noise, or feels like they're falling, their body will tighten and they'll throw their arms out in front of them.
- **Rooting reflex.** When you stroke a newborn's cheek, they'll turn toward the touch and open their mouth.
- **Stepping reflex.** When you hold a baby upright with their feet on the floor, they'll lift one foot, and then the other, like they're taking steps.
- **Grasping reflex** When you press your finger against a baby's palm, they'll grasp it.

Eventually, many of your newborn's reflexes will become coordinated, voluntary movements. But first, she must become acquainted with her entire body. From birth to around three months of age, you will see your baby reach the following milestones. They'll:

- **Ball hands into fists**
- **Grasp objects**
- **Strengthens neck and back muscles**
- **Raise their head and chest while on stomach**
- **Strengthen arms and legs**

Four to Six Months

By four months, your baby will have gained more muscle control, but more strength will be needed for her next great challenge—to sit up. In order to accomplish this feat, the following milestones must be reached:

- Raise and hold her head up while lying on her tummy
- Push up and arch her back to lift her chest. You'll likely see this take place around five months of age
- Rock, kick, and swim-like arm motions while in the tummy position

The milestones that lead to sitting up are also skills that lead to crawling. Here are some things you can do to encourage these behaviors:

- **Provide supervised tummy time**
- **Place a toy just out of reach**
- **Help her to sit up, supported by pillows**

Seven to Nine Months

Your baby's arms and legs are growing stronger, and becoming more coordinated by their seventh month of age. Turning over, sitting up, and getting up on their hands and knees are skills that are mastered during this time. They're curious about the world around them, and this curiosity motivates them to move. As their skills build, they progress faster toward mobility. Watch out, Mom! You're about to have a crawler on your hands. Once your child is mobile, your days will be spent following your little explorer around to keep her out of **trouble** and harm.

Ten to Twelve Months

Once crawling is mastered, you'll blink and your baby will be changing again. One day, you may come in to find them standing up in their crib, waiting to be rescued from the new scary standing position. You'll likely need to teach them how to bend at the knees to get themselves back down without falling. Balance and strength will build their confidence to take that tentative first step while holding on to something secure. A baby's temperament largely determines how quickly they will master this skill. If they're more cautious, then they'll take a little more time. If they're more daring, then they'll master it more quickly. Here are some things you can do to encourage your baby to stand and walk:

- Help her up and guide her to hold on to a sturdy piece of furniture.
- Walk with her while lending a supportive hand.
- Give lots of praise and encouragement.

Once a baby begins pulling herself up and walking with support, she will quickly graduate to walking independently. Congratulations! Your baby is really on the move now!

A Bump in the Road

What if your child just isn't hitting those important milestones at the right times? What should you do? When should you begin to worry? In order to answer these questions, it's important to remember a couple of things:

- Children are individuals, and each develops at their own pace within a range of time. Don't expect your child to hit every milestone right away.
- A child's unique temperament can help determine at what pace they'll develop. For example, some children are more cautious, some are more sensitive, some are more daring, and some are more trusting.
- The environment can impact a child's rate of development. Such things as experiences in their home, school, or community; their nutrition; their freedom to explore; the amount of interaction they get from friends and family members; and whether or not they were born prematurely all impact the pace of development.

If your child is still within the range, don't panic. Make sure you're providing them with lots of opportunities for tummy time, play, and fun. Also make sure you make it to all of your well-child visits. Your medical provider will track your baby's development. If your child is delayed well past the range of a milestone, then your medical provider will likely refer you to a specialist. Developmental problems are best dealt with sooner rather than later. From birth, your baby is building skills that eventually support her walking independently. Early milestones help her to build strength, balance, and coordination that, over time, will lead to those first few independent steps. Watch for those **early** milestones, see your medical provider if you're concerned about any **delays**, **childproof** your home to make it safe for your baby, and then sit back and enjoy the show.

Resources include:

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