

Motor development: The first six months

Reviewed by SickKids Staff | Last updated: October 18th 2009

Read about motor development in the first six months of a baby's life. Milestones such as head control, sitting up and rolling over are discussed.

Key points

- Babies will develop control of their head, neck and upper body during the first few months of life.
- By month six, babies have increased flexibility and may be able to roll over, move around on their tummy and sit up if placed in a sitting position.

This page describes some of the milestones that your baby will reach during the first six months of life. It is important to keep in mind, however, that every baby develops at their own pace, and that the ages listed are not set in stone. Also, this page describes development of the healthy baby who was born at full term. A baby who was born prematurely would meet these milestones a bit later than a full-term baby.



Month one

By the time your baby is one month old, their neck and shoulder muscles are stronger than at birth, and they have better control of their head. If they are lying on their tummy, they may be able to lift their chin off the ground for a short time. However, you will still need to support your baby's head if you are carrying them around, and their head will continue to lag behind if you try to pull them from a lying position to sitting. When held in the sitting position, your baby's back will be almost completely rounded, and they may be able to hold up their head for a moment.

If held in the standing position, your baby will flop down at the knees and hips. Their walking reflex is still intact though; when the sole of their foot is pressed on a flat surface, they will try

to take a step.

Your baby still usually holds their hands in a closed position. If you open their fingers and give them something to hold, they will grasp it for a few seconds and then drop it.

Month two

By the end of the second month, you will notice continuing improvements in your baby's head control. When lying on their tummy, they will be able to lift their head and shoulders off the bed a few inches and support themselves with their arms. If you hold them up against your shoulder, they should be able to hold their head up by themselves for a short time.

If you place your baby on their back, they will raise their arms above their head in a U shape. This indicates that your baby is using their arms in a symmetrical manner, and it is a very important accomplishment. It means that your baby will soon be ready to use their hands together to accomplish a particular task.

If you hold your baby in a sitting position, you may notice that their back, though still quite rounded, is starting to straighten out. They may be able to hold their head up in this position for a very short time.

Your baby's grasp reflex continues to get weaker this month. As the grasp reflex disappears, your baby will start to grasp things voluntarily. If you try to give them an object to hold, their fingers will open. If they can grasp the object, they will try to bring it to their mouth.

Month three

This month, your baby's neck and shoulder muscles continue to become stronger. By the end of the third month, if they are placed on their tummy, they should be able to hold their head above the plane of the rest of their body. After the third month, a baby's ability to hold their head up when placed on their tummy is no longer used to assess head control.

Your baby's arm and hand coordination will continue to improve and become more deliberate. Their grasp reflex has disappeared, and their hands are mostly open now. If you offer them a toy to hold, they will open their hand and try to hold it between their palm and their fingers. This is called the ulnar grasp. Because they have not yet learned how to use their thumb, they will almost inevitably drop the object soon after grasping it.

If you place your baby on their tummy or back, they will kick their legs vigorously. This is good exercise for the months ahead, in preparation for crawling and walking.

If you pull them into a sitting position, their head will lag only slightly. Once sitting, they will be able to hold their head up for longer periods.

Month four

By the end of the fourth month, your baby's back muscles are much stronger than before, and they have much better control over the movements of their arms and legs. The combination of these skills will allow your baby to roll from their stomach to their back with a bit of practice. However, they still do not have the strength to roll from their back to their stomach. They may find this very frustrating at times.

Your little one now has very good head control when held in the sitting position, and they can hold their head up constantly. However, if you suddenly sway your baby, their head will wobble, indicating that their head control is not totally complete.

Your baby will become quite fascinated with their hands and what they can do with them. They spend a lot of time watching their hands as they move them toward objects. However, their coordination continues to be quite limited and they cannot move their thumb independently of their other fingers. Therefore, they still cannot pick up toys very well at this point.

Month five

Your baby is very flexible, and one thing they will enjoy thoroughly is bringing their toes to their mouth for a taste.

Their neck, shoulder, and chest muscles continue to gain in strength. Their back has straightened out and the muscle tone in their torso is firm. This allows them to support their upper body and sit for a few seconds without falling over. They are now able to roll over completely - from tummy to back and then from their back to their tummy. Now they are officially mobile.

Now, when you pull your baby to the sitting position, they will have no head lag at all. Their head control is excellent now. If they are in the sitting position and you sway them, their head will not wobble at all.

Your baby is becoming much better at grasping and holding larger objects. They will try to cup their hand around a toy that they want to pick up. If they manage to grasp the toy, they will use their fingers and mouth to explore it more fully. Babies like to put things in their mouths

because the lips and tongue are very sensitive; they are great resources for exploring new objects.

Month six

By now, rolling over is no problem! Your baby may start to push their way along on their tummy, or propel themselves backwards with their hands. Chances are that your baby will learn to sit up this month, if you prop them up in that position. They will be pretty wobbly, and they'll need to use their hands to support themselves while sitting. Their legs will be strong enough to stand, with your support, for a minute or two.

Around this time, your baby may start to lose interest in staring at their hand movements. Maybe this is because they are finally mobile, and able to explore other things!

Virtual care services for children

Boomerang Health was opened by SickKids to provide communities in Ontario with greater access to community-based services for children and adolescents. For more information on virtual care services in Ontario to support motor development, visit [Boomerang Health](#) powered by SickKids.

Please visit [AboutKidsHealth.ca](#) for more child health information.

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