

From Four to Eight Months



Congratulations! You made it through the first 3 months! You have probably made necessary changes in your lifestyle and your baby has likely settled into a routine. Her daily patterns of eating, sleeping, play and nap times have become more regular. Your baby now smiles, has better body control, makes funny sounds, reaches, grasps and pulls things to her mouth. These exciting developments probably have replaced much of her early crying. This is a really fun time to be with your baby. Take time every day to play with and enjoy her. If you have other children, involve them by asking them to bring diapers, get safe toys for the baby and by just talking to and smiling at her. There are still many challenges ahead but this can be a very happy and rewarding time for your whole family.

Schedule visits for well child care and immunizations at 4 months and 6 months of age

Your Developing Baby

All babies learn and grow at different rates. Your baby will not be the same as your neighbor's baby or your sister's baby at the same age. However, babies grow in a predictable way. This means that most babies can do similar things by a given age.

If your baby was born prematurely, she will act like a younger baby. For example, a baby born 6 weeks early may act more like a 4 1/2 month old when she is really 6 months of age.

GENERAL DEVELOPMENT

Your baby will probably have doubled her birth weight by the time she is about 6 months of age. Her head size, weight, and length will all be increasing at about the same rate. She will be awake more now and interested in the things that are going on around her. Sometime during this period the first teeth begin to come in.

DEVELOPMENT OF SMALL MUSCLES

Your baby will look and play with her hands. This is the beginning of hand-eye coordination. Your baby will learn that her hands are part of her, distinct from other objects.

DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS

Your baby is developing her own unique personality. Some babies assume everyone is their friend. Others need a little time to warm up to new people. By 4 or 5 months of age most babies will respond to familiar people and friendly faces with smiles.

Show your baby a mirror and watch her look at, talk to and reach out for the other baby she sees.

DEVELOPMENT OF LARGE MUSCLES

There will be many new things your baby will learn to do during this time. When placed on her tummy she will push with her arms and lift her head so she can look around. Your baby will learn to roll over, usually from stomach to back first, then from back to stomach. Sitting is another thing she will learn. At first she will need your help; then she will learn to help herself by leaning forward on her hands and arms.

You can record your baby's important developmental milestones in the **Baby Your Baby Health Keepsake**.

Healthy Teeth

By now your baby may have one or two teeth. The center lower teeth are usually first to appear.

Taking good care of "baby" teeth is important because these teeth save space in the jaw for the permanent teeth. Early loss of baby teeth can lead to crooked and crowded permanent teeth.

Giving your baby a bottle of formula, milk, fruit juice or sweet liquid as a pacifier at naptime or as a nighttime comforter can harm teeth. When the baby is awake, she can continually swallow the liquid. However, during sleep the fluid pools around the front teeth, causing tooth decay.



You can protect your baby's teeth by following these suggestions:

- Start to clean baby's teeth as soon as they come in. Use a gauze square wrapped around your finger or a child size soft-bristled toothbrush.
- Offer only clean pacifiers (not dipped in honey or other liquids).
- Don't let baby go to sleep with a bottle of formula, milk, fruit juice, or sweetened liquid. Instead, give baby a bottle of plain cool water if necessary.
- Do not give sugar water, soft drinks or jello water in baby's bottle.
- If there is not enough fluoride in the water, give baby daily fluoride drops as prescribed by your dentist or health care provider. The American Dental Association recommends that children receive adequate fluoride beginning at 6 months of age and that children visit the dentist no later than their first birthday. This is a great time to call and schedule a visit for her.

With your help, your baby can have healthy teeth.

Teething

Teething has been blamed for more medical and mood problems than almost anything else in a baby's first year. Problems such as high fevers, seizures, lung infections, and diarrhea are sometimes blamed on teething. There is no evidence that these are related.

Teething often starts around the same time babies begin to outgrow the immunity they received from their mothers during the prenatal period. During this time (5 to 7 months of age) babies become more vulnerable to common childhood infections. Don't assume that fever or other symptoms are a result of teething, because serious infections might be overlooked.

Parents are often tempted to blame changes in their baby's personality on teething. But, between 6 and 12 months of age, babies normally become more demanding and show anger and frustration. Teething pain is not likely to be the only reason for the mood changes you see in your baby.

Teething infants may drool more and chew on anything in sight. Their appetite may drop but usually not enough to slow weight gain. A very mild fever or loose bowel movements may also be noted.

Here are some simple ways to help a teething baby:

- Gently rub baby's gums with your finger.
- Let her chew on a cold wash cloth.
- Offer her teething rings that can be refrigerated for a numbing effect.
- Acetaminophen can be used as a mild pain reliever. Check with your health care provider for dosages and suggestions about the use of this medicine.

With a little patience and the simple helps above, you and your baby can make it through teething time.

Safety

As your baby develops, she may do things more quickly than you ever dreamed possible.

Here are some rules to follow to protect your baby and prevent injury:

FALLS

- Never leave baby alone on a table, bed, couch, or any other surface from which she could fall.

- Do not leave baby alone in an infant seat. Infant seats are lightweight and tip over easily.
- When baby is in a stroller, car seat, or shopping cart, keep the harness or safety strap properly attached.

BURNS

- Install smoke detectors in every sleeping area.
- Cover unused electrical outlets with shock stoppers or safety caps. Keep electrical cords out of reach.
- Keep high chairs, playpens and infant seats away from stoves, work counters, radiators and furnaces.
- Set your water heater to its lowest or "warm" setting. The water temperature should be no higher than 120° F.
- Check bath water temperature with your elbow.
- Keep hot liquids and hot foods out of baby's reach.
- Don't smoke around your baby.

SUFFOCATION

- Never leave plastic bags or sheeting within baby's reach.
- Make sure small objects like buttons, coins, or diaper pins are out of reach.
- Keep baby's crib away from drapery or window blind cords.
- Never prop a bottle in baby's mouth. She could spit up and breathe in the fluid.
- Keep stuffed animals and pillows out of cribs.

POISONING

- Keep vitamins, medicines, flowers, plants, and other poisons (such as soaps, cleaners, cigarettes, ashes and butts, illegal drugs, cosmetics, etc.) out of baby's sight and reach.

TOYS

- Choose playthings that are too large to swallow, are lightweight, have no sharp points or edges, are non-toxic, and won't easily catch fire.
- Make sure that stuffed animals have strong seams that cannot easily be chewed or torn open. Loose bows, felt, and ribbons should be removed. Facial features on dolls and stuffed animals, such as eyes and noses, should be strongly attached so they cannot be pulled or chewed off.

- Select playthings that are appropriate for baby's age. Use recommended age labeling as a guide and look for safety messages on toy packaging.

SUNBURN

- Don't let baby sit in direct sunlight. A baby's skin is thinner and more sensitive to the sun's rays.
- Protect baby's skin by using sunscreen with SPF 45 or higher and a hat (after 6 months of age).
- Protect baby even on overcast days. Reflected light from sand and water can burn baby even under an umbrella.
- Protect baby's eyes on bright days. Use a hat, covered stroller or carriage, or keep baby in a shaded area when outdoors. Direct sunlight can permanently damage her eyes.

As your baby develops she may do things more quickly than you ever dreamed possible.

Nutrition

Breast milk or formula will meet your baby's needs until about 6 months of age. Many babies are then ready for solid foods (jarred baby foods or pureed homemade foods). During this time, your baby will be sitting up, and can open her mouth when she sees food being offered to her.

Foods provide the needed nutrients as well as textures and consistencies that match your baby's developmental skills. Iron-fortified infant rice cereal is usually the first solid food used. It can be mixed with breast milk or formula to form a smooth, semi-liquid texture like cream soup.

When you start any new cereal or food, try just one new food at a time for a week. This gives your baby a chance to become familiar with each new taste. Stop feeding the new food if your baby becomes extra fussy, gets diarrhea, or if a rash appears. This may mean she has a food allergy. Check with your health care provider before giving the same food again. All solid foods should be fed to your baby

in a small spoon. Spoon feeding helps your baby learn to use her lips, tongue, gums and teeth, and helps with speech development. Don't put baby foods or cereals in bottles which can cause choking and overfeeding.

Babies usually have the skills to start drinking from a cup between 6 and 9 months of age. You can start giving juice at this time. Unsweetened fruit juices are often the first choice. Juice should not be given in the bottle. Formula can be offered from a cup at mealtimes, and water can be used between meals.

You will need to hold the cup to your baby's mouth until she can hold it herself. Like other aspects of feeding babies, this can be a messy job. Special cups that control spills are available. Once cup drinking is mastered, a regular cup should be used.

Finally, continue to keep mealtime pleasant. This is not the time to scold or force-feed. Follow your baby's cues as to when she has had enough to eat. Mealtime should be a positive experience for both you and your baby.

Immunizations

Parents' schedules are often filled with long "to do" lists. Remembering which vaccines children may need and when they are due can add to the challenge of getting it all done. The Utah Immunization Program is making it easier for busy parents. The program has developed an electronic immunization reminder service that will automatically remind enrolled parents when their children's immunizations are due.

The immunization reminder service is found on the Utah Immunization Program website at www.immunize-utah.org. Just click on the "Immunize Them" icon.

The immunization reminder service sends an e-mail message letting you know which immunizations are recommended for your baby. You can register to receive email reminders by giving your baby's birth date and a current email address. You do not have to give any other personal information. The immunization reminder service will automatically stop after your baby is thirteen months of age. All information is then deleted from the system.

For more information about the

immunization reminder system or immunizations, call the Immunization Hotline at 1-800-275-0659.



Hearing and Speech

By 5 to 6 months of age, babies are actively enjoying the pleasure of babbling to themselves and to you. With babbling, you will hear vowel sounds and consonants. Vowel sounds are soft and may be "Aaah" or "Oooh." The first consonant sounds your baby may add to vowel sounds are P, B, or M.

Because all babies – even those with hearing loss – have the ability to coo and babble, you cannot always assume your baby hears. You can only spot hearing loss by watching your baby's reaction or lack of reaction to sound. If your baby doesn't turn her head to look for your voice or other sounds, tell your health care provider. Ask to be referred to a licensed audiologist who has experience in testing for hearing loss in babies.

The following checklist is a guide to normal speech and hearing development for a baby 4 to 8 months of age. As time goes by, check to see if your baby does most of the things listed below:

- Responds to mother's voice
- Enjoys rattles and other sounds that are out of sight
- Sometimes will cry or act upset if she hears a loud noise
- When sleeping in a quiet room, begins to move, wakes up, or cries when someone talks or when there is a noise.
- Laughs out loud
- Makes sounds like a-da, e-be, ba-ba, p-p-poooh
- Makes noises to herself when playing.

Child Care

Choosing a caregiver or day care center is an important decision. You have the right to ask the caregivers specific questions and to personally visit the home or day care center before you trust your baby to their care. It's a good idea to visit more than one caregiver and compare the advantages of each. Look for a person or staff who are experienced, who like babies, and who have warm, friendly personalities.

The following questions should be answered to your satisfaction:

Is the caregiver licensed and registered with the state?

Licensed caregivers must meet certain health and safety standards. You can get names of licensed caregivers from the Department of Health's Bureau of Licensing or www.health.utah.gov/licensing.

How many infants under 2 years of age are in the home/center?

It is important that the caregiver has time to attend to your baby's routine of sleep, play, socializing, diapering, and feeding. There should be one caregiver for every four infants (under 2 years of age) in the home/center.

How are emergencies handled?

Caregivers should have a written emergency plan that covers what to do in care of fire, serious illness, injury, or poisoning. The caregiver should also have first aid training.

How will the infant be cared for during the day?

Discuss your baby's feeding routine with the caregiver. Find out about scheduled time for play, rest, feeding, and other activities.

Is the caregiver's home/center safe and clean?

The caregiver should have the proper equipment and furniture for babies. Check for safe cribs and playpens, high chairs, sinks for washing hands after changing diapers, and toys that are safe and appropriate for your baby's age.

WAYS TO HELP THE CAREGIVER

- Introduce your baby to the caregiver and spend some time at the home/center with your baby before actually leaving her.

- Make sure your baby's immunizations are up to date. This will protect her, and will ensure that other infants in the home/center are not exposed to preventable diseases.
- When delivering and picking up your baby from the caregiver, take time to talk about any problems or unusual behaviors that day.
- Provide the caregiver with your work phone numbers, the name and number of your baby's health care provider, important health history (such as allergies, recent illnesses), dosages of medicines and times to be given, a statement of permission to seek medical treatment in an emergency, and the name and number of a relative or other person to contact if you cannot be reached in an emergency.
- When your baby is ill and you cannot stay home, have an alternative caregiver ready. Don't expose other children to illnesses.

It is never easy to entrust the care of your baby to another person, but with extra care and preparation you will feel more comfortable with your choice.

Is My Baby OK?

Every parent wants a normal, healthy baby. Unfortunately, some babies have health or developmental problems. Some of these problems are obvious at birth while many are not apparent for a time after birth. Sometimes, as baby becomes older, parents may begin to have concerns about her growth, development, or physical well being. These concerns may be based on a family health history of developmental delays, observations the parents have made of their baby over time or on comparisons with their older children. Parents may receive mixed opinions from well-meaning friends and relatives about what to do when such concerns arise.

Is there really a cause for concern? Sometimes, yes. However, identifying growth or developmental delays early allows these babies to get needed health care services sooner. Knowing if other family members have had growth or

developmental delays can also help you get help sooner. In many cases, early treatment can aid the baby to function normally by the time she reaches school age. Babies with more severe handicapping conditions can also be helped toward as normal a childhood as possible.

Warning signs of delays in growth, development, or of physical problems:

- Persistent back arching, fisting of hands, and uncontrolled crossing or "scissoring" of legs
- Slow head growth or slow weight gain
- Delays of more than two months in achieving normal developmental milestones such as rolling, sitting, crawling, and talking
- Lack of response to voices or visual stimulation
- Premature birth or complications during or after delivery
- Chronic ear or lung infections
- Not reaching for toys
- Resistance to being held and cuddled
- Periods of unresponsiveness or "blank" spells
- Feeding problems
- Persistent problems between parent and infant such as parent frustration about what the infant wants or why she acts a certain way, or parents expecting too much from the infant

Where can parents turn for help if they are concerned about their baby's development? The first step should be the baby's health care provider, who is familiar with the baby and knows about the normal stages of infant growth and development and can suggest specialized resources that may help.

Families who do not have a regular health care provider can contact the public health nurse in their local health department. These nurses are experienced in normal growth and development.

There are many community resources to which parents can turn for help. Call the Baby Your Baby Hotline at 1-800-826-9662.

Postpartum Health for Mom

You are probably ready to get back into the swing of things by now – even if you can't quite get into your favorite jeans just yet. And, whether or not you are planning to have more children, it is important that you try to return to a healthy weight before too long. Carrying extra weight is hard on your health and can lead to many chronic health problems such as diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers, joint problems and complications in your next pregnancy.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

With a new baby around, finding the time to fit exercise into your daily schedule is difficult but not impossible as long as you make it a priority. Try to do three 10 or 20-minute sessions a day if you can't fit in a full 30-60 minutes at one time. And be sure to find an activity that you enjoy so exercise is fun.

NUTRITION

You have spent the last year paying close attention to what your body is telling you. Now is not the time to turn off that inner speaker. This is a great time to become more aware of your body's needs and the food you put in it. Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables along with whole grains and lean meats. This is a great time to start the healthy eating habits that will benefit you and your growing family for years to come.

Learning to control how much you eat at each meal may help you reach a healthy weight. Here are some guidelines: A serving of meat should be about the size of a deck of cards. Your fist is equal to about 2 servings of pasta or cereal. One serving of vegetables is about the same as 1/2 of a baseball, and one serving of fat is about the same as two dimes stacked on top of each other. A medium-sized apple or orange is one serving of fruit. Another good rule is to fill 1/2 of your plate with fruits and vegetables and split the other half of your plate between a serving of meat and a serving of rice or pasta.