

INFANT CARE from 4 Months to 6 Months

Have you noticed how active and assertive your baby is becoming? It is important to remember that development follows the same sequence in all children but the rate of acquisition of these skills varies with each individual. Also, no baby is average, each is special, advancing in his own way. Similarly, you will notice that he is developing specific personality traits.

Your baby may be rolling from abdomen to back and/or from back to side. Your baby can hold his head steady when held in a sitting position and can sit erect if propped up. Your baby can also look at objects in front of him and may try to reach for them. If your baby does grasp the object he will often do it with both hands and bring it to his mouth. At this age, babies are mouth explorers.

Your baby is able to locate sound and turn his head in that direction. Most babies are very vocal now and squeal, coo, babble, and "talk" a great deal when spoken to.

Your baby is also learning about cause and effect. He shakes a rattle and it makes noise, throws the rattle and you make noise!

Feeding

Your infant is still on breast milk or commercial formula (or a combination of both). A decision about fluoride supplements should be made if your water is lacking sufficient quantities. Iron supplementing may be started because infants are making their own red blood cells and their reserve from birth may not have been adequately replaced through feedings.

You may begin introducing solid foods between now and the six month visit if your child shows readiness signs. Your child will probably be ready closer to the six month visit than to this one. Begin with infant rice cereal 1-2 times per day. Mix two teaspoons of dry cereal with breast milk, formula, or water until it becomes a thin soup. Place the contents of the baby spoon about one half of the way back on your baby's tongue to aid swallowing. As your baby improves handling this, gradually increase the thickness of the cereal and the amount fed to two tablespoons. Ask for advice and guidelines about when and which solid foods to introduce to your baby. Remember to introduce only one new food at a time and continue it for 4 to 7 days to make sure he is not allergic.

Sleeping

Infants will continue to increase their amount of night time sleep. Most babies sleep 6 to 8 hours at night. Continue the bedtime routine to encourage sleep. Infants also begin to adapt a little more to the family routine and decrease sleeping time during the day to a morning nap and/or an afternoon nap. A routine schedule helps your baby feel secure.

Elimination

Previous patterns will continue but with the addition of solid foods, stools may change in appearance. Breastfed babies' bowel movements will be firmer when solid foods are added to their diets. Green vegetables may give a green color to the stool (as may iron supplements--a dark green).

Safety

Your baby is definitely becoming more active and because of this, burns can be a major danger. Do not walk with hot foods or liquids while carrying your infant as this is a common cause of burns. A cup of coffee is the most common food cause of scalded children. If you smoke, then ask for help in eliminating the habit. Not only is passive smoke harmful to your baby but with his increasing activity your infant is more likely to get burned.

Never keep the baby in an infant seat on a table or counter where a fall could be life threatening. The floor is probably still a safe place to play at this age. Keep out of your child's reach all small things which could be picked up, swallowed, or chewed up such as safety pins, buttons, coins, plant leaves, etc. These things are choking and aspiration hazards.

Remove, secure, or cover all low lying objects that are potentially life endangering: electrical outlets, all electrical cords (these can be chewed on with fatal result), fans, other electrical equipment.

Develop a fire escape plan for your home. Recheck or purchase a smoke detector(s) and fire extinguisher(s). (See references below which have a good section* on accident prevention and safety or which are devoted to this subject.**)

Development/Play

At this age, your infant more actively engages in play with you! He can entertain himself for short periods. Encourage this independence; put him on the floor or in the playpen on his abdomen with soft different-textured, bright-colored toys to try to reach and grasp. Prop him in an infant seat or chair (not unattended) with playthings. Use a swing (not unattended), take a walk with your baby in a stroller or just rock on the porch to give him exposure to new sights, sounds, and motions. When you place him in front of a mirror, you open a whole new area of entertainment for your baby. Take off his clothes and allow him increased freedom of movement. Allow him time to splash and play in the tub. Let an alternate care giver feed, change, and bathe your infant. This provides a different variety of interaction and stimuli. Remember, your infant does have a short attention span and will become bored and fussy, so alternate and vary activities.

Continue to talk and sing to your baby. Respond enthusiastically to his coos and babbles. Although it is tempting to use "baby talk," try to talk to him in adult language most of the time. Read to your infant. Provide him with soft plastic/cloth books, because reading is very important to success as an adult; you cannot start early enough.

Suggested Handouts, Readings and Videos

Suggested Handouts from previous visit should be reviewed as well as how the immunizations were tolerated.

For this visit if not previously given: Immunizations⁵ (generally and or specific to those to be given next visit), Selecting a Day Care or Sitter⁴, **Safety for Children, **Preventing Accidental Ingestions and Poisonings, **Preventing Injuries and Choking, **Preventing Burns, **When Choking Occurs, **Child Safety: How to Keep Your Home Safe for Your Baby⁸

For this visit consider: Introducing Solid Foods¹, Managing the Common Cold.

Additional Resources for Parents

General Child Care

*The Well Baby Book by M. Samuels and N. Samuels; *Babyhood by P. Leach; *Dr. Spock's Baby and Child Care by B. Spock and M. Rothenberg; *What To Expect the First Year by A. Eisenberg, H. Murkoff, and S. Hathaway; *Caring For Your Baby and Young Child by American Academy of Pediatrics; *A Family Doctor's Answer Guide to Your Child's Health by M. Cohen (after 1/95); Taking Care of Your Child by R. Pantell, J. Fries, and D. Vickery;

Growth and Development

Infants and Mothers by T. Brazelton; The First Twelve Months of Life by T. Caplan; Kid Fitness by K. Cooper; Arnold's Fitness for Kids Ages Birth-5 by A. Schwarzenegger.

Other

Mother's Almanac by M. Kelly and E. Parsons; Working and Caring by T. Berry Brazelton; Whole Child, Whole Parent by P. Berends; How To Have a Smarter Baby by S. Ludington-Hoe and S. Golant; Your Child's Self-Esteem by Dorothy Briggs; **A Sigh of Relief by Martin Green; Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems by R. Ferber; Helping Your Child Sleep Through the Night by J. Cuthbertson and S. Schevill



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