

4 Month Boy

Key Thought

Experience the pride and joy of watching the fast changes and growing responsiveness of your baby. The highlight of your day is when he learns something new, smiles and coos at you, grasps your finger tightly, and seems to understand everything you say. Love your baby! Watch him grow! Enjoy helping him learn!

What Your Baby is Learning

Physically:

His back and neck muscles are growing stronger each day. When lying on his stomach, he will extend his arms and legs and arch his back. This strengthens his neck muscles to help him develop the head control necessary for sitting up. He may now push himself up onto his elbows. When you pull him up to a sitting position, he lifts his head along with his body. His spine is straightening and strengthening.

He has a bigger tummy. This is the month most babies double their birth weight. So even though he eats less frequently, he will continue to gain weight. Bottle fed babies usually eat only four or five times a day, while exclusively breastfed babies eat six to eight times a day.

At four months your baby is beginning to develop depth perception. He can perceive an object's position, size, and shape. With that information his brain directs his hand to reach out and grasp it. Now he has both the motor skills and the brain development to coordinate this action.

By now your baby should be able to follow an object with his eyes up and down as well as side to side. Although he has been able to see colors since birth, he could only see differences between very different colors like red, green, and yellow. Now he can even distinguish between similar tones of the same color as orange and red. He will still prefer the primary colors, however.

Your baby used to see one thing, feel another, and listen to a third all at the same time. But now he is beginning to focus all his attention on one thing at a time. After repeatedly seeing an object and touching it at the same time, he discovers it is there permanently.

He will amuse himself for short periods now by doing one action repeatedly until he is sure of the result. He will then do it a different way to see if the results are the same or different.

Propped up with pillows in a highchair he will enjoy seeing his world from a new perspective. He will try to encircle toys with his arms and rake them closer to himself.

Language:

Your baby is babbling a lot. He is learning he can make sounds and then repeat them. He will be experimenting with combining the vowel sounds like ah, oh, and oo with different consonants like m, k, and b. He may seem to get stuck on one sound. When he feels sure he can do it again, he'll try something new. This is the beginning of his memory bank of sounds and what they feel like making. Those babbled sounds will eventually take on meaning and be produced at will.

Carry on "conversations" with your baby. Ask a question and wait for an "answer." Respond enthusiastically to whatever sounds he makes. Introduce simple words that relate to his everyday life. Expand on what he says by emphasizing single words with repetition. When he says, "ba," you may say, "Do you want a ball? This is your ball." His "ba" will eventually become "ball" and he will know what that word means.

Social:

At four months your baby responds differently to family members and strangers. He will smile and wiggle and show he knows what to expect when family members approach him. But the smiles stop when he sees a stranger nearby. He may get very quiet and just stare at the new person.

Your baby recognizes major differences in the intonation of voices. He shows he is contented when the voices around him are pleasant. But when he hears sharp words, he may cry or shake his head or push away. He cannot know whether the words are angry or just teasing, but he will show distress.

Since he will have longer periods awake, he will begin to demand social attention. His fussing for attention will be quite different from his cries from hunger or discomfort. He will enjoy faces and noises you make. He will show delight at games of peek-a-boo and toys like jack-in-a-box. He is beginning to develop a sense of humor. Enjoy experimenting to see what tickles his funny bone.

Until now, when he was awake, he wanted your attention. Now you may have a few minutes to yourself, even when he is not sleeping. For the first time in his life, he will not be demanding your attention every moment he is awake.

Until recently your baby has been grasping things handed to him as a reflex. Now he eagerly accepts small objects you hand him. He feels the object, puts it in his mouth, and shakes it. He has only been feeling things other than himself. He will soon begin playing with his own hands and feet. He will be fascinated that he not only is feeling an object but feels his own touch. He realizes that his hand or foot is part of himself and distinct from other

objects or people around him. This begins the great adventure of discovering what is self and what is other.

Ways You Can Help

Physical Development

Your baby must be able to move about freely. Keep your baby's room at a comfortable temperature so he does not need too many clothes or covers tucked in tightly. Be careful that one-piece sleepers do not restrict their feet and toes. For at least some time every day he should be free of all clothes so he can move about unhindered. This is important for good muscle development.

He should spend much of his waking time on his tummy. He will want to lift his head and chest to look around and develop good muscle control in the process. Only on his tummy will he begin to learn how to push or pull himself along the floor. He's not ready yet to begin creeping, but he needs to develop these muscles now.

It is important that your baby develop both sides of his body equally. He will naturally turn toward the direction he receives care, so he should be placed facing different directions often. Placing a mobile directly overhead will encourage him to look straight up too.

If you notice his hair is worn off more on one side or the other, he is spending too much time on his back with his head turned in that direction. If he is allowed to continue, his head will become flatter on that side and bulge on the other. Babies with lopsided heads often develop lopsided faces and later teeth don't meet properly. Provide good incentives for him to turn both directions evenly.

Sleep

Sleep is valuable time for your baby. He needs plenty of sleep to have enough energy for all the learning and growing he is doing. During the REM (rapid eye movement) phase of his sleep his brain is making important connections. All his learning, movement, and thoughts are directed by the connections in his brain. Without these connections your baby could not understand everything he sees, hears, touches, tastes, and smells as he explores his world. He will also begin to sleep longer at night and have longer awake periods.

Play

His depth perception, recognition of object permanence and muscle strength and coordination need lots of experience exploring a wide variety of objects.

Choose different colored objects, and things with different textures and shapes.

Reading

You sow seeds of a love for reading by holding your baby on your lap and reading a book with large, brightly colored pictures for him to see. Even though he doesn't understand the words, he will enjoy the rhythm of your speech, funny sounds you make, and being held.

What to Expect Next

- He may cut his first tooth.
- He will turn toward new sounds.
- He will recognize his own name.
- He may be ready to start solid food.

Starting Solid Foods

Doctors usually recommend beginning to introduce solid foods at six months, but sometimes as early as four months. Breast milk and formula are your baby's main source of nutrition throughout the first year.

You will know your baby is ready to begin solids when:

- Your doctor recommends solid food to meet your baby's nutritional needs.
- Your baby's tongue-thrust reflex is gone or greatly diminished. This reflex prevents infants from choking on foreign objects. It also causes them to push food out of their mouths.
- Your baby has good head and neck control and can sit up.
- Your baby is interested in food. He is ready to begin when he stares and grabs at your food.

How to begin feeding solid foods:

- Don't add cereal to your baby's bottle unless ordered by your doctor. It does not help him to learn to eat solid foods, though it may help him sleep for longer periods at night.
- At the start, remember that milk will still be the main source of nourishment, so solids should be given at the end of the feeding after breast milk or formula. The amount will be small and of a liquid consistency at first.
- Pick a time of day when your baby is hungry but not starving and when he is not tired and cranky.

- Usually, his first solid food is iron-fortified rice cereal with breast milk or formula.
- Let him smell and suck a little bit on a spoon. If he rejects it, wait a minute and try again.
- To start with, more may be spilled out than swallowed, but this will soon change. Eating food is quite different from drinking milk, and your baby needs to learn how to do it.
- Only when a wide range of solids are taken in considerable amounts will milk become less important, but it remains a valuable source of calcium and other minerals and vitamins.

What foods to feed:

- After baby cereal, begin with fruits and vegetables.
- Only introduce one new food at a time and leave 3-4 days between new foods. This will help you identify any food allergies your baby may have.

What food to avoid feeding:

- Eggs, especially the whites
- Citrus is highly acidic and causes serious diaper rash.
- Honey may contain spores that cause botulism in babies.
- Cow's milk does not have all the nutrition that babies need.
- Fish, seafood, peanuts, peanut butter, tree nuts, and wheat cereals until 2-3 years old when they are more easily digested and less likely to cause allergies.
- Don't feed food with salt, sugar, tea, coffee, milk flavoring and artificial colors, flavors and preservatives, babies don't need these and they may be harmful.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are amazed at how marvelously You have made our baby. You have made him so he can explore his world and learn. We delight in each new discovery he makes. May we always please You as we discover more about You through the baby You gave us. In Jesus' name. Amen