

4 Months Girl

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 she learns something new, smiles and coos at you, grasps your finger tightly, and seems to understand everything you say. Love your baby! Watch her grow! Enjoy helping her learn!

What Your Baby is Learning

Physically:

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

She has a bigger tummy. This is the month most babies double their birth weight. So even though she eats less frequently, she 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. She can perceive an object's position, size, and shape. With that information her brain directs her hand to reach out and grasp it. Now she has both the motor skills and the brain development to co-ordinate this action.

By now your baby should be able to follow an object with her eyes up and down as well as side to side. Although she has been able to see colors since birth, she could only see differences between very different colors like red, green, and yellow. Now she can even distinguish between similar tones of the same color as orange and red. She 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 she is beginning to focus all her attention on one thing at a time. After repeatedly seeing an object and touching it at the same time, she discovers it is there permanently.

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

Propped up with pillows in a highchair she will enjoy seeing her world from a new perspective. She will try to encircle toys with her arms and rake them closer to herself.

Language:

Your baby is babbling a lot. She is learning she can make sounds and then repeat them. She will be experimenting with combining the vowel sounds like ah, oh, and oo with different consonants like m, k, and b. She may seem to get stuck on one sound. When she feels sure she can do it again, she'll try something new. This is the beginning of her 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 she makes. Introduce simple words that relate to her everyday life. Expand on what she says by emphasizing single words with repetition. When she says, "ba," you may say, "Do you want a ball? This is your ball." Her "ba" will eventually become "ball" and she will know what that word means.

Social:

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

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

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

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

Until recently your baby has been grasping things handed to her as a reflex. Now she eagerly accepts small objects you hand to her. She feels the object, puts it in her mouth, and shakes it. She has only been feeling things other than herself. She will soon begin playing with her own hands and feet. She will be fascinated that she not only is feeling an object but feels her own touch. She realizes that her hand or foot is part of herself and distinct from other objects or people around her. 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 she 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 she should be free of all clothes so she can move about unhindered. This is important for good muscle development.

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

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

If you notice her hair is worn off more on one side or the other, she is spending too much time on her back with her head turned that direction. If she is allowed to continue, her 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 her to turn both directions evenly.

Sleep

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

Play

Her depth perception, recognition of object permanence and muscle strength and co-ordination 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 her to see. Even though she doesn't understand the words, she will enjoy the rhythm of your speech, funny sounds you make, and being held.

What to Expect Next

- She may cut her first tooth.
- She will turn toward new sounds.
- She will recognize her own name.
- She 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. She is ready to begin when she 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 her to learn to eat solid foods, though it may help her 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 she is not tired and cranky.
- Usually, her first solid food is iron-fortified rice cereal with breast milk or formula.
- Let her smell and suck a little bit on a spoon. If she 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 her so she can explore her world and learn. We delight in each new discovery she makes. May we always please You as we discover more about You through the baby You gave us. In Jesus' name. Amen