

# Questions & Answers about physical development— infancy through preschool

Children grow up quickly. The infant who can't crawl becomes the toddler who is always on the move. Children learn large motor skills, like walking and running, at different rates. This development occurs in stages, each new one building on the last. How fast a child grows is less important than the way they learn new skills. Children of all ages learn best when they can feel safe moving about their homes. Children need to visit a doctor regularly who can chart their rate of growth. Parents can also ask the doctor any questions they may have about the way their children are growing.

## 1. What are some important ways children grow during the first five years of life?

FIRST YEAR:

**Birth-2 months:** Babies focus on your face when you talk; arm and leg movements are clumsy; babies have weak neck muscles so they can't control their head movements.

**3-4 months:** Babies begin to control their heads and can lift their chests when placed on their stomachs. You should give your baby some playtime on her stomach, but ALWAYS place your child on her *back* to sleep.

**4-5 months:** Babies roll from side to back and/or from back to side.

**6-7 months:** Babies can turn completely over (front to back and/or back to front)

**7 months:** Babies can pull themselves up to stand but have trouble sitting down again.

**7-8 months:** Babies can sit up steadily with the support of their arms.

**8-10 months:** Babies can creep on their stomachs or begin to crawl on their hands and knees. (Some babies do not learn to crawl until after they learn to stand.)

**9-11 months:** Babies can walk

when led by the hands or "cruise" holding onto furniture.

**12-15 months:** Babies can stand without holding on to anything and begin walking.

**18 months:** Toddlers are walking well, both forward and backwards; they can creep down stairs and get on and off a low chair; they can throw a ball without losing balance.

**24 months:** Children are able to run and climb.

**36 months:** Children are fine-tuning large motor skills; they can switch feet while climbing stairs, ride a tricycle, jump and balance on one foot. They can throw a ball overhand.

**36-48 months:** Children can run and skip well, play simple ball games, and are skilled tricycle riders.

**48-60 months:** Children can hop, skip, run, play with a ball, and climb.

## 2. What can I do to help my child grow?

**Birth to 12 months:**

- Allow your baby plenty of safe space for rolling, scooting and crawling.
- Make sure your baby's clothing is loose enough so that his or her arms and legs are free to move.
- Play games with your baby

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that gently encourage arm and leg movement.

- To help your baby learn to crawl, place a favorite toy just out of reach.

- Have safe, low-lying objects like a table that your baby can use for pulling up to a standing position.

#### **One to 3 years old:**

- Let your child play with pull toys that make noise. These will encourage him or her to walk forward and backward.

- Help your child walk up and down stairs.

- Help your child jump off low steps and over small objects.

- Offer chances for your child to climb up and through things.

- Let your child have large and small balls to encourage throwing and kicking.

- Let your child pull a wagon to take objects from place to place.

#### **Four to 5 years old:**

- Let your child walk along a straight line to learn balance.

- Offer a tumbling mat for engaging in active play such as rolls and somersaults.

- Play catch with your child, starting with a large ball and gradually changing to smaller balls.

### **3. How much will my baby grow during the first year?**

On average, babies grow 10 inches in height and 3 times their birth weight during the first year of life. By age 1, children grow slower. Keep in mind that no child grows at a perfect rate throughout childhood. Mini growth spurts are very common.

### **4. What can I do to help my child grow normally?**

Make sure your child gets enough rest, good food, and exercise. A balanced diet will help your child grow properly. Make sure your children get enough exercise for good health and fitness. Remember, too, that children are different so they need different amounts of sleep. Make sure your child gets the sleep that's right for them.

### **5. What are some signs that something is wrong with my child's growth?**

Check with your doctor, if your child:

- Is very clumsy compared to other children the same age.

- Has no head control at 7 months.

- Doesn't move arms or legs much.

- Can't sit alone at 12 months.

- Can't stand alone at 15 months.

- Can't walk at 18 months.

- Can't jump up and down or over a small object at 4 years.

- Can't hop on one foot at 6 years.

- Can't balance on one foot for five seconds at 6 years.

### **6. How does playing help children grow?**

Play allows children to try out and practice new skills. Children need chances to build upper body strength by pulling themselves up and hanging, by swinging, by rolling balls and by throwing bean bags. They need to strengthen their lower bodies by jumping and balancing.

Parents can help children try

different activities, but should not pressure them. Give them time to practice bigger challenges. Ensure their safety but do not overprotect them. Parks are great places where children can use their large motor skills. Play equipment should be big and sturdy, so that children can practice balancing, crawling through, hanging, and climbing.

### **7. What are growing pains?**

One in four children 3-5 years old and 8-12 years old have growing pains. The most likely causes of growing pains are jumping, climbing, and other activities that take place during a child's busy day. The pain is usually felt in muscles rather than joints and it varies from mild to strong. Most children who have growing pains do not feel them every day. Massaging, stretching, and applying a warm compress can all help. Help your child by telling them that growing pains will pass as they grow up. Check with your doctor, if your child complains of a lot of pain.

#### **Sources:**

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