

HOW I GROW: Months Seven and Eight¹

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Welcome to another intriguing stage in your child's development. This is an exciting time for your baby. At seven and eight months, she is more curious than ever and is probably learning to crawl! She is also developing all sorts of skills, such as sitting without help, coordinating her hands and eyes, and calming herself when she is upset. Provide constant opportunities to satisfy her curiosity about the world around her.

Now that your baby wants to crawl everywhere, she needs you to baby-proof your house so she can explore safely. Cover electrical outlets and move breakable objects out of reach. Put safety latches on cabinets containing dangerous substances. If necessary, rearrange furniture or put up a child gate to keep her out of a particular room or away from stairs. It is much healthier for your baby to have a safe home to explore, rather than to be placed in a playpen or walker for long periods. By providing a safe home and many opportunities to explore her environment on her hands and

knees, you will help your baby develop physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually.

Physical Development

During this time, your baby is working hard to learn to move himself. He has looked at interesting things around him for several months, but has been able to touch only what you put within his reach. Now he wants to go to things himself. He will practice movement skills over and over.

By seven months, your baby has already been sitting up with your help and may even sit by himself. In the next couple of months, he will learn to raise himself to a sitting position from a lying position. You can help your baby learn to move into a sitting position by playing a game with him. Place your baby on his stomach. Dangle a favorite toy out of reach and encourage him to move into a sitting position to get it.

Your baby is also learning to crawl. When he is first learning, he may pull himself forward on his stomach, or he may move his arms forward first and then pull his legs along. Help your baby practice by encouraging him to scoot to you or to a toy. By the end of eight months, he will probably be using his arms and legs together to crawl across the room.

Your baby has probably started to pull himself to a standing position. A standing position gives him another view of his environment, and it also prepares him to learn to walk in

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the coming months. Encourage your baby to pull himself up holding onto your fingers or a baby gate.

By seven months, your baby can grasp objects well. He can hold two objects at the same time. His thumb-finger grasp is not precise yet, but every day he is developing greater control of his fingers. He will become more interested in smaller objects and will use his fingers more to explore them. During these months, continue to provide your baby with lots of toys of different sizes, shapes, and textures to feel and move about.

Now that your baby can grab and hold objects on purpose, he is also learning how to let go on purpose. At first, he will let go by throwing the object. Later he will gain more control. Even when he gains more control, he will continue to throw things. In fact, your baby loves to throw and drop things. Throwing and dropping things helps develop his hand-eye coordination and also helps him learn about his environment. At the beginning, your baby will not watch what he drops. He is too busy watching his hand and the movements he is making. Soon, though, he will follow the object with his eyes, watching it hit the floor and seeing what happens then.

During these months, play games with your baby that develop his hand-eye coordination. For example, give him a wooden spoon and let him see and feel what happens when he pounds on the floor, a metal pot, or a pillow.

Social Development

During these two months, your baby continues to be very social with you and those she sees regularly. She will smile and giggle when she sees you. She will watch your face and listen to you talk, and she will babble in return. She will try to copy your mouth movements and mimic the sounds she hears. Say “mama” and “dada” to her and encourage her to try the sounds. Pretend to talk to her on a toy phone. Hold the toy receiver to her ear and encourage her to talk back to you.

Your baby loves to interact with you. In fact, she loves to interact with you so much that she will try crying for your attention. This “demand cry” is normal, but can be very difficult to live with if it gets out of hand.

Parent Alert! Starting around the seventh month, it is possible to spoil a baby. For the first months of her life, a baby cries because she feels discomfort. By the seventh month, a baby will sometimes cry for attention, wanting to be picked up and held. By the eighth month, she could develop the habit of using the demand cry too often. You can help her avoid making the demand cry a habit. Do not wait for your baby to cry to play with her. As often as possible, approach her first and play a game together, sing a song, or read a book with her on your lap. When you cannot play with her, make sure she has plenty of safe, interesting things to do so that she does not get bored. For example, let her look at herself in a mirror. Babies this age are as fascinated by their own faces as by others. If your baby is happily occupied most of the day, she will be less likely to overuse the demand cry.

Emotional Development

At this age, your baby shows a wide range of emotions, and sometimes his moods seem to change quickly. He may laugh and show pleasure during play, and then suddenly



cry and show distress if he thinks a toy was taken away. He feels strongly about what he likes and dislikes. He may enthusiastically play with nesting cups one time, but next time reject them because he wants to play with a ball. To help your baby learn about his emotions, talk to him about them. When he laughs during playtime, tell him how happy he seems playing with his toy. When he cries, tell him he is upset and help him discover what he is upset about. Perhaps he is frustrated because he cannot reach a toy he really wants.

Your seven-month-old baby can understand some meaning expressed by a person's face and tone of voice. He can tell if you are happy or angry by your look and sound, even though he cannot understand your words.

Around the eighth month, some babies might become anxious around strangers. Your baby might not smile at or want to be held by people he does not know. He might even scream. He is expressing his attachment to you and others who regularly care for and play with him. He knows you and prefers to be with you. With time, his anxious reactions to those he does not know will lessen.

Intellectual Development

During the last several months, your baby has been watching her arms and hands as she uses them to hold or move objects. Gradually she has become equally interested in the objects. She studies the objects by holding, feeling, and chewing on them. She is particularly interested in what happens when she moves the objects. Your baby will spend a lot of time banging things together, throwing things, and dropping things, just to see what happens. When your baby is in her crib or high chair, play a dropping game with her. Give her things that fall differently, such as a ball, a wooden spoon, and a washcloth, to drop over the side. As she drops each item, talk to her about how it falls and lands.

With all of her banging, dropping, and throwing, your baby is beginning to understand cause and effect. She is beginning to understand that when she does something, something else happens. In her seventh or eighth month, she will probably become interested in pop-up toys, because when she presses a button, the box springs open. Show her some simple mechanisms around the house. Let her discover what happens when she flips a light switch. Your baby will love to explore cause and effect for the next couple of years.

In addition to cause and effect, your baby is also beginning to understand a concept called object permanence. Up to



about the seventh month, if a baby cannot see an object, the object does not seem to exist for her. You can help your baby understand the concept of object permanence by playing different games with her. For example, playing peek-a-boo teaches her that even when you disappear, she can expect to see you again. Later you can play hide-and-seek with her by holding a blanket in front of your face. Call to your baby from behind the blanket. When she tugs on the blanket, drop it and let her find you.

For another game, show your baby an interesting toy and then cover it partially with a blanket. Your baby will be more likely to try to get the toy if she can see it. As she masters the skill of finding a toy that is partially hidden, try covering the toy completely and encourage her to look for it.

Your baby enjoys babbling and mimicking sounds. In her eighth month, she may even say some words that she has heard, such as Mama, Dada, or bye-bye, even though she does not understand their meaning. Soon, though, your baby will learn that Mama means specifically her mother, not someone else.

To help your baby develop her language skills, continue talking to her a lot. Talk to her about what you are doing and what she is doing. Name different objects in the environment. As she plays with an object, describe it to her. All of your talking will help your baby's understanding tremendously. However, even though your baby is developing perfectly well, she may not say many words at all. She may not really begin to talk until 18 months or older.

Parent Time

Now that you have settled into a routine with your new baby, it may be a good time to consider joining a parent support group. Many parents find groups like this to be a good source of advice and a good time for comparing notes about various issues with other parents. To find a parent support group in your area, contact La Leche League or ask your pediatrician. Sometimes places of worship and other organizations host parent support groups as well. You might even want to start an informal group yourself, to give you and other parents of young children a chance to get together to have fun and share experiences. Every parent needs an occasional break. By taking a break and spending a little time with other adults, you will feel refreshed and ready to give your baby your enthusiastic attention.



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