

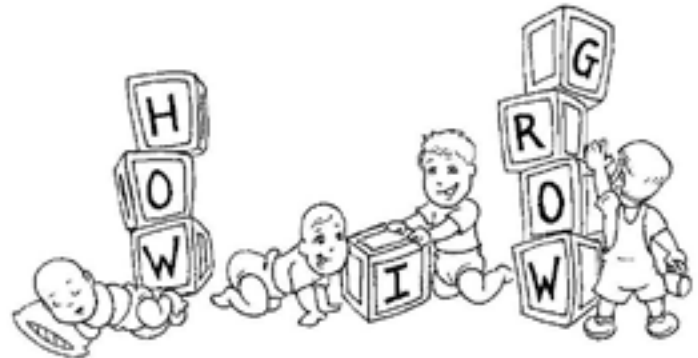
HOW I GROW: Months Three and Four¹

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Wow! So much has happened since the birth of your baby! You are probably getting used to caring for her, with all of the diapers, the constant feedings, and very likely a good bit of crying. What may surprise you however is how quickly your baby changes from month to month. It was not long ago that you had a newborn, but already your baby is growing and becoming a person in her own right. She is learning to do so many things, and so very quickly. She is even learning to play.

Play is essential for a baby's healthy development. Babies love to play. At this age they often enjoy splashing in the tub or kicking their feet in the air as they lay on their back. Through play, babies learn about themselves and the world around them.

A loving parent is the best toy any baby can have. Take time to lean over your baby and talk to her. Respond to her sounds in a cheerful and loving style. Give her brightly colored objects to look at, and safe objects to hold and put in her mouth. Dance with her. She will be delighted by the swaying from side to side and the turning and twisting to music. By creating a stimulating, playful environment, parents help their infant develop physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually.



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Physical Development

During this stage, your infant is exploring the different parts of his body. Upon discovering his hand, he will stare at it time and time again. At some point, he will bring his two hands together and begin exploring his fingers. Exploring his hands and feet as something different from other objects is an exciting time in your infant's development.

Your infant is also becoming much more active and physically able. He may be able to:

- Hold his head steadier and turn it side to side.
- Roll onto one side or roll over.
- Begin to grasp objects and put them in his mouth.
- Lift his head and upper body when lying down.
- Sit up with some help.

As your baby matures, some new safety concerns will arise. Now that he can amuse himself by wiggling, kicking, turning to one side, and even rolling over, be extra careful where you lay him down. Young infants have been known to roll off beds while napping or being diapered.

Your baby's vision continues to mature, so place colorful pictures or large photos of the family on the side of his crib. He will enjoy staring at the bright colors and the happy faces of family members. Change the pictures from time to time when you notice that he has become bored with them.

You may also want to place a mirror six to eight inches in front of him. Fasten it to the head of the crib and place your baby on his stomach. He will soon discover his image in the mirror and have a wonderful time laughing and squealing at himself.

To continue strengthening your infant's eye muscles and improve his coordination, keep playing games with your baby using a squeaky toy or ball. With your baby lying on his back, get his attention by squeaking the toy. Slowly move the toy in a circle and have him follow it. At a later date, move the toy back and forth. Once he masters these games, stand behind him and have him move his head more to see the toy.

Encourage him to reach for it. Also try placing your baby on his stomach and letting him reach for the toy. This will help him develop his neck muscles.

Just remember not to overstimulate your infant. Everyone needs some down time. As you get to know your baby, you will be able to pick up on his cues letting you know when he needs a break.

Social Development

Most babies become very sociable during the third month. They may cry a bit less, smile and laugh more, and get really excited when they see a familiar face. Babies this age seem to like everyone and will often smile or laugh to say "thank you." Continue singing, humming, and talking with your child.

Help your baby explore her world and enhance her social development by taking her with you as you work around the house. Put her in a playpen, stroller or a safe infant seat while you are folding laundry, cooking, washing dishes, or doing other chores. Talk to her about the things you are doing and let her touch and hold some items.

Your baby is learning how she relates to her surroundings as an individual. At around four months, your baby will likely start babbling. She will repeat consonant-vowel combinations such as "bababababa" or "nanananana." She will probably laugh and squeal with delight upon hearing



herself. Encourage these sounds by repeating what your baby says. This is another fun game to play with her.

At four months, your infant is still very social, but she may begin to prefer her primary caregiver over anyone else. She also may fuss or have trouble sleeping unless she is at home or in some other pleasant and familiar environment. Don't let this trouble you. These are good signs that your baby is becoming attached to you and her home. This is all a natural part of your baby's development, a way for her to express her growing identity.

Emotional Development

Your baby is really getting good at expressing his different emotions. When happy, he may smile, coo, squeal, and even babble with delight. He may also let you know that he is tired, bored, distressed, or fearful. Make sure to respond to your child's different emotions. How you respond to his feelings will make a difference in his long-term well-being. If he is happy, then smile at him and let him know you are happy too. If he seems distressed, take time to talk to him about how he is feeling. Try to put yourself in his shoes. It is easy for adults to forget how distressing some everyday events can be for a baby. You may want to hold him close so he feels cared for and secure.

Do not downplay your baby's different emotions. Babies need parents who can understand and handle good or troubled feelings with empathy. Do not think you are spoiling him by responding to his every need. Remember, it is impossible to spoil your baby during this stage of development.



Intellectual Development

As you continue to see physical, social, and emotional changes in your baby, you will also see changes in the way she responds to her environment. For example, your baby will suck on a bottle nipple differently than a toy or a breast. She will soon discover that when she kicks her feet, the mobile on her crib moves. She is learning to associate the movement of the mobile with her action. She is also learning to anticipate events. She may cry out with hunger, but as soon as you enter the room and move toward her, she may stop crying.

All of the changes in the way your baby responds to her environment show that her cognitive abilities are really increasing! At this stage of development she may:

- realize she is a person.
- show evidence of memory.
- enjoy repeating the same games over and over.
- recognize family members and other familiar faces.
- understand all the basic sounds of language.
- babble for pleasure.

This is a great age for your baby to improve her language skills. Talk to your baby even though she cannot respond or fully understand. She likes to hear the sound of your voice. Talk to her in short simple sentences using different intonations and exaggerated pitch sounds. Talk to her as you go through your daily routines together. Emphasize the here and now. Pick her up and walk around outside telling her

about the things you see. Let her touch the tree bark, get her hands wet in a clean bath, or put her feet in the sandbox.

You can also help your baby learn more by reading to her. Choose picture books that are made of stiff cardboard so she can feel the pages without folding and tearing them. Hold the book 7 to 8 inches from your baby's face while you look at it together. Point out any attractive colors and shapes on the page and talk to her about pictures of animals or drawings of cartoon characters. Show delight and enthusiasm as you read. Be prepared: your baby will likely have a favorite book that she wants to look at over and over again!



Parent Time

By now you are realizing that being a parent can be a lot of work! Parenting is meaningful and worthwhile, but it is also important to take care of yourself. Just as play helps your infant develop and feel good about his world, play helps you maintain a positive attitude. Allow family and friends to support you so you can take a break. Remember the fun things you enjoyed before you were a parent? Make some time for yourself to do whatever you enjoy most.

Below are a few ideas to help you start thinking about what you would like to do with a couple hours for yourself:

- Write in your journal
- Take a ride in the car to no place in particular
- Go clothes shopping
- Get a message
- Go see a movie
- Watch TV
- Read a good book
- Take a bike ride

Do not feel guilty for wanting and needing to have time for yourself. Your baby needs a parent who is happy, healthy, and full of joy!

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