



First Steps

1 Month

Key Thought

This is a time of beginnings. Your baby is beginning to be aware of what is around. The human face and her own hands and feet fascinate your baby. The first ooohs and ahhs of speech and the first smiles may happen during this month. Enjoy watching for the first time your baby does different things.

Advice to Mom

- Hug, touch, smile, listen to and play with your baby whenever you can.
- You cannot spoil your baby at this age.
- Encourage Dad to take care of his baby sometimes.
- Don't be ashamed to ask questions or ask for help.

What Your Baby is Learning

Physical:

Your baby's neck muscles are getting stronger, so she will be able to raise her head up briefly when lying on her stomach. She may be able to turn her head from side to side now too. If you have not established at least one period of "tummy time" every day, start it today. Find a time when your baby is awake and not hungry. She should be able to move her arms and legs freely. Give her interesting things to look at so that she will lift and turn her head from side to side. It is so important for her muscular development and flexibility, also to develop depth perception.

Your baby has learned to focus both eyes and her vision is best at eight to ten inches (20-25 cm). She may follow an object with her eyes from side to front. She will stare at faces and likes the high contrast of black and white patterns best.

By one month your baby can briefly grip tightly to objects put in her hand. Most of the time she will keep her hands fisted.

One month olds suck well on anything placed in their mouth.

Language:

Listening is the first step to language. Responding to sounds is another step in language development and your baby startles, moves, or blinks in response to sounds. This month your baby may begin cooing, ooohing and ahhhhing, and smiling.

Social:

Your baby prefers a face-like pattern to any other shapes to look at. One month old babies usually sleep between 14-18 hours each day with 2-4 "fussy" hours and 2-3 alert and quiet hours.

Even though your baby has been able to recognize you since she was a few days old, by the end of this month she may be able to show it. About half of all babies this age begin to show an obvious recognition of their parents, reacting differently to mom and dad than they do to strangers. Your baby may quiet down and make eye contact with you. Some babies at this age are even able to smile when they see their parents.



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Ways You Can Help

Safe Handling.

Avoid jiggling your baby or throwing her up in the air. Her brain could bruise if it bangs into her hard skull. Never shake her in anger or in fun. Her brain could bruise this way, too.

Respond immediately to your baby's cries.

Going to her when she's upset helps her build trust and a strong emotional bond. Responding to your baby's bids for attention during happy times is just as important. Your love and support give your baby a secure base from which to explore the world. Love, attention, and affection have a direct and measurable impact on a child's physical, mental, and emotional growth.

Spend lots of time engaging your baby in eye contact.

She loves to look at your face and especially your eyes. She sees you best about 8-10 inches away. Don't worry if her eyes wander independently or if she looks at you "out of the corner of her eye," that is normal.

Variety is good.

Place your baby in her crib with her head at one end of the crib one day, then the next day turn her around so that her head is at the other end, and so on. She will then practice turning her head both ways toward the light. It is the first step toward developing the sense of two different sides of the body, an appreciation of direction, and sense of time.

Talk to your baby.

Talk to her as you diaper, feed, or bathe her. Try to look at her while you speak so she knows the words are directed to her. Describe what you are doing. Avoid baby talk, so she begins to hear the language you want her to understand and speak. At this point your baby is most attracted to the sound, pitch, and rhythm of your voice - the music of language. Children whose parents speak to them more have significantly higher IQs and richer vocabularies than children who don't receive much verbal stimulation.

Answer back to your baby.

When your baby coos, be sure to coo and gurgle back, and talk to her face-to-face. A few babies may also begin early squeals and laughter. If you have things to do, she'll still enjoy hearing your voice from across the room. She'll hold your gaze for ever-longer periods now.

Sing to your baby.

Sing children's songs and lullabies. Share your favorite worship and praise songs as you have devotions. Play a variety of music for your baby. The richer the variety, the better for your baby. Inevitably, you'll see your baby react more pleasurably to one type of music than to another as she begins to develop preferences.



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Pacifier or Thumb

Babies love to suck. They need to suck. And usually they are not satisfied with only the sucking they do while feeding. If you can soothe your fussy baby by reading, singing, or cuddling, a pacifier or thumb will not be necessary. But most babies, even after being fed, burped, cuddled, rocked, and played with will still seem fussy at times. Go ahead and try a pacifier. Use it intelligently, not as a substitute for nurturing.

Babies use a pacifier to comfort and soothe themselves. They find it a helpful way to deal with tension. Since most children stop using a pacifier or their thumb long before permanent teeth begin to appear, around age six, there is no damage done to permanent teeth and jaw formation.

Sucking on a pacifier frees your baby to explore her world with both hands and it is usually easier to wean a baby off a pacifier than off her thumb. Yet, the thumb is always available and is under the baby's own control. Most babies have a fixed idea about whether to suck a pacifier or their thumb. It is more important, at this point, that your baby be comforted than to force your method on her.

If you are breastfeeding, it is best to avoid pacifiers until your baby has learned to latch on and suck well and your milk supply is well established.

What to Expect Next

- Smiles and laughs.
- Able to hold head at a 45-degree angle.
- Babbling, making sounds that please her.
- Follows objects with eyes.
- Movements become smoother.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are so amazed as we see Your precious gift to us change so rapidly. May we never lose the wonder that you entrust one of your little ones into our care. Please give us the strength and patience to be the best parents we can be to this baby. In Jesus' name. Amen



Mom Bonding

Bonding is that intense attachment you develop with your baby. It makes you feel that you want to shower them with love and affection and protect them at all cost. Your touch, movement, voice, body and facial expressions, your taste and smell shape your baby's physical, intellectual, emotional, and sexual foundations. Early bonding, nurturing touch, movement and breast feeding encode the developing brain for a lifetime of affectionate relationships.

For many moms, this happens over the first few days after birth. For others, it happens over a longer period. But bonding occurs as you care for your baby's needs daily. As you get to know your baby and learn how to soothe her and enjoy her, your feelings grow deeper and deeper. One day as you look at your baby, you will realize you are completely in love with her.

If, after a few weeks, you still don't feel more attached to and comfortable with your baby than you did at first, or you feel detached and resentful of her, you should talk to your doctor. You may be suffering from postpartum depression. This can hinder your developing a loving bond with your baby. The sooner postpartum depression is treated, the better for both you and your baby. The longer you wait, the harder it will be to gain your baby's trust and affection.

Dad Bonding

Sometimes dad has been involved with his baby since before her birth. He felt her move in utero, he saw her in a sonogram, and he was there at her birth. Yet even this, is not enough for some dads to feel deep affection. Spending time with the new baby and meeting some of her physical needs, will give dad a chance to fall in love with his baby.

The secret to male bonding with a baby is that dad is not supposed to be another mother. What your baby needs is for you to be yourself. Dads treat babies differently from moms and that is as it should be. Your baby already has one mom, she doesn't need another.

Suggestions to help dad bond with his baby:

- Feed your baby a middle of the night bottle.
- Take pictures in lots of different settings.
- Play with your baby while your wife fixes dinner.
- Carry your baby in a Snuggly while you take a walk, garden, watch the news, or ride your stationary bike.
- Take your baby with you when you run errands in the car (But never leave your baby in the car by herself!!)
- Have a staring contest or play peek a boo.

Postpartum Depression

Between 50 and 80% of new moms get the baby blues, a mild form of depression that begins a few days or a week after delivery and generally lasts no more than two weeks. Baby blues come with changes in hormone levels, lack of sleep, changes in lifestyle and frustration of an expectation that you would be the best mother in the world. Weepiness, anxiety, and insomnia are symptoms of the baby blues.

Some things you can do to minimize this mild depression:

- Mobilize a support network.
- Make sure your own needs are being met.
- Get enough rest and good food.
- Try to get some help around the house.
- Find other new mothers to talk to.

But postpartum depression (PPD) affects about 10-20% of new moms and can last from two weeks to a year. If you are crying all day long, are unable to sleep when your baby sleeps even though you are exhausted, are moody and irritable, have a loss of appetite, panic attacks, feel suicidal, or have seriously negative thoughts about your baby, you should contact your healthcare provider immediately. The frequency, intensity, and duration of your feelings are important information to give your doctor. Your health care provider is the best person to diagnose postpartum depression and to treat it.

PPD is caused by a combination of hormonal, biochemical, psychosocial, and environmental influences.

Some common risk factors for PPD are:

A family history of depression or other mental problems.

Bouts of intense anxiety during your pregnancy.

Your pregnancy was unplanned.

Your spouse or partner is unsupportive.

You've recently gone through a separation or divorce.

You went through a serious life change such as a big move or loss of a job at or around the time you had your baby.

You had obstetric complications, were subject to early childhood trauma, a history of abuse, or a dysfunctional family.

Many women have a number of these risk factors and never get depressed and others have none or just one risk factor and have a major depression. But if you or your husband think you are depressed, ask a professional's opinion immediately. You are not a bad mother. You are not crazy. Postpartum depression is real and there is treatment available. This will not last forever and you will feel better again.