



Infancy: An Overview of the First Year

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The first couple of years of a child's life are critical to development. Primary things a child needs for healthy development is to feel safe, loved, and cared for. They need to know that when they are hungry they will be fed and when they are uncomfortable, sick, or afraid they will be comforted. Research shows that children that are loved, nurtured, and given positive attention are more likely to be healthy (emotionally and physically), demonstrate positive behavior, and learn at a normal rate.

People that study children look at three distinct, but interrelated areas—*physical, cognitive, and social and emotional* development. Physical development includes the body's growth. Cognitive development involves learning, reasoning, and problem solving. Social and emotional development looks at a child's feelings and how they interact with others.

Physical Development

Height and Weight Growth is faster during the first two years than any other time in life. By 5-months birth weight doubles; it has tripled by 1 year; and a child is four times heavier by about 2 1/2. In addition to the body growing very fast, the brain grows very fast.

Nutrition Since growth is so fast, nutrition is very important. Infants should be fed breast milk or formula with iron for the first 4-6 months. They should be fed when they are hungry rather than on a

strict schedule such as every 3 hours. This allows the child to eat to his or her satisfaction when he or she is ready. Infants should be held in an upright or slightly reclined position while they are eating. Laying an infant in a bed and propping a bottle in his or her mouth can increase the risk of ear infection.

Around 6 months, infants can begin having baby cereal (mixed with breast milk or formula). Begin by giving the infant one new selection of food at a time. This will help you figure out if a child has an allergy to a certain food. By the seventh month strained fruits and vegetables are appropriate.

Once a child has stronger jaws and teeth, finger foods are appropriate and generally welcomed. The first tooth is generally seen between 3 and 12 months, with the average child having at least one tooth around 7 months. Around 12 months, most babies can eat many of the solid foods that the rest of the family eats.

Motor Development Most six-month olds can reach for objects and have the motor development to hold onto such things as keys and rattles. Many can roll over from their back to stomach and back to their original position. They can sit up with support and sometimes alone. Most 1-year-olds can stand while holding on to an object such as a table. They can stand alone and walk with limited or no assistance by about 1 1/2.

Social and Emotional Development: Feelings and Interaction

Many basic emotions are present at infancy. This means that from a very young age, babies can show how they are feeling -- happy, excited, upset, or bored.

Children who are outgoing and easy to get along with tend to be friendly social adults. Those that are shy have a greater tendency to be reserved adults.

Many children fit in one of the following categories.

Easy: Fairly predictable; cheerful; adjusts to change easily

Slow-to-Warm-Up: Few reactions to environmental changes; adjusts slowly

Difficult: Unpredictable/irregular in daily routines; Reacts slowly to new experiences

Things that adults can do to help children who are fussy/whiny include smiling and talking in a soothing voice.

Some infants may use such favorite items as a blanket, stuffed animal or toy to help reduce stress and anxiety. These items are called transitional objects.

Cognitive Development: Reasoning and Problem Solving

Infants use their senses to think, learn, and solve problems. Activities that require touching and feeling and items that are different sizes and textures and have varying sounds and color help children's thought processes and problem solving skills. Use of senses helps them carry out activities

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that they cannot think through logically and promotes social interaction.

One of the most important things adults should know about an infant's thinking is that they do not understand that objects and people continue to exist if they are out of sight. They truly display the notion "out of sight out of mind." For example, if an infant is playing with a toy and the toy falls out of the child's sight, he or she will not look for it.

Quick Facts

- Development begins in the womb and continues throughout life.
- All children go through the same stages of development, however developmental tasks may occur at different times and rates.
- Many factors affect development including environment, culture, family structure, and economic status.
- Caring adults (parents, extended family members, and child-care providers) are needed to help children develop.
- Age-appropriate activities and items include mobiles, rattles, play dough, finger painting, books with lots of color and sounds, blocks, and water activities.