

Your baby will continue to grow rapidly during these months. The typical 8-month-old boy weighs between 8 to 10 kg. Girls tend to weigh a bit less. By his first birthday, the average child has tripled his birth weight and is between 70 and 80 cm tall. Head growth between 8 and 12 months slows down a bit from the first 6 months. Typical head size at 8 months is 44.5 cm in circumference; by one year, it's 46 cm. Remember every baby grows at his own rate, so you should continue having regular clinic checks to monitor your baby's growth and ensure that he is continuing to follow the pattern established in his first 8 months.

Over the last few months, baby will have mastered the art of sitting and rolling. He may still be a bit wobbly, but he is also able to get himself upright again. He appears to be in constant motion and dislikes being flat on his back. He would much rather flip himself over onto his stomach ready to push himself off at a fast crawl, or at least the semblance of a crawl.

A few children never do crawl. Instead, they use alternative movement methods, such as scuttling on their bottoms or slipping and sliding on their stomachs. As long as your baby is learning to coordinate each side of his body and is using each arm and leg equally, there's no cause for concern. The important thing is that he's able to explore his surroundings on his own and is developing the strength and coordination needed for walking. However, discuss any movement or lack of movement concerns with the clinic nurse.

Crawling may however be a very short-lived period. Your baby soon realises that there is an even better way of moving about – walking. Suddenly he is pulling himself up to a standing position on anything that appears sturdy enough to him. Unfortunately he may not know how to sit down again and gets very frustrated at being stuck whilst holding on to the couch. Guide him a few times by bending his knees and enabling him to sit. He'll catch on quickly and, like a new game crawl, off to the next possible piece of furniture to pull himself up to standing. This gets

followed by a few tentative steps and suddenly he is cruising around all the furniture. He may even surprise you with his first truly independent steps on his first birthday.

Vision

As your baby becomes more mobile, so his vision is improving. His depth perception is almost fully developed and his ability to crawl is improving his eye/hand coordination. Your baby can now recognise people and objects across a room. By the time he is a year old he will be able to judge distances and surprise you by throwing things fairly accurately.

Fine motor skills

During the first 6 to 7 months, baby has been developing the use of his large muscle groups. He has been gaining control over his head and neck, then his stomach and back, and now he is working on getting those legs to walk. This has been a very noticeable development stage for you, his parent. What may not have been so noticeable has been his growing control over the smaller muscles, especially in his hands. From about 3 months, he was grabbing everything within reach with both his hands and taking them to his mouth, then he started to use each hand on its own. Now he is understanding the use of his hands and one of the best games to play is to hold something and then purposely let it go and watch it drop to the floor. He is beginning to examine the objects within his grasp more thoroughly. He picks them up, passes them from one hand to the other, shakes them, bangs them, and if there is a hole in it he will poke his little fingers into the hole. He may also start to clap and wave. By his first birthday he is also gaining control over his thumbs and first two fingers and tries to pick up the smallest objects, from raisins and peas to dust balls and ants.

Hearing and talking/Language development

Although you have been talking to your baby from the day he was born, it is only now that he understands more language and your conversations take on a greater significance. Do not be misled by his inability to talk in more than a conversational babble with an occasional 'Da' or 'Ma' thrown in for good measure. He is able to understand a lot more than you suspect and he listens to every word that you say. He will start to respond to simple verbal requests and try to imitate words and sounds. He may even use the sound appropriately, e.g. he sees a picture of a cow and he will try to 'moo' like one too.

There is a great variation in the age at which children begin to say truly recognisable words. Some may have a few words by their first birthday and some may only truly speak when they are able to speak in a full sentence. As long as your baby is communicating to you in a very conversational way and experimenting with sounds that vary in pitch, intensity and quality, he is getting ready to talk.

Social and emotional

As your baby develops his physical independence and his ability to comprehend a lot more of his world, he is also making great strides in his emotional independence. As physically difficult as it is for him to take his first steps, it is also emotionally difficult.

During these months, your child may sometimes seem like two separate babies. First there's the one who's open, affectionate, and outgoing with you. But then there's another one who's anxious, clingy, and easily frightened around unfamiliar people or objects. These varying behavioural patterns are occurring because your baby is able to tell the difference between familiar and unfamiliar situations.

Anxiety around strangers is usually one of the first emotional milestones your baby will reach. Another important milestone is the start of separation anxiety. He realises there is only one of you and out of sight is no longer out of mind; instead it is a source of distress. A great deal of fuss can be made by your baby should you leave the room. He doesn't yet understand that you will be returning to him. This emotional period usually peaks between 10 and 18 months and then fades by the age of 2 years.

A third emotional milestone is his growing sense of self-awareness. He is beginning to see himself as being a person separate from you. This is very noticeable when he sees his own reflection. Up till 8 months or so, he was unable to recognise his own reflection. Now this changes and he understands that he is seeing himself in the mirror.

As all these emotional milestones are being grasped and understood by your baby, he will also become more assertive and want things done in a particular way. Unfortunately he is unable to tell you of his needs and this could be the start of many power struggles. A calm outcome to these frustrating times is possible as long as you, the parent, can also remain calm and loving and provide as much emotional security as possible. (*Read more: Emotional development*)

Playing/Interacting/ Cognitive development

An 8-month-old is curious about everything, and every 2 or 3 minutes he changes his focus of attention and is continually moving from one activity to another. By 12 months, his ability to focus improves and he can spend as long as 15 minutes on one activity; however it's more likely that his curiosity for the world is greater than his desire to sit still. His favourite playthings are not the fancy, colourful, noisy baby toys, but rather the everyday objects that get used by the people around him. The cardboard box the toy came in is far more enticing than the actual toy. He is also happiest left to explore and discover interesting items to play with. New playthings that we as parents might think are fun can actually be intimidating or frightening or something that is similar to what he has already discovered is boring. Often your baby won't need your help to discover objects that fall into this middle ground of newness. In fact, as soon as he can crawl, he'll be off in search of new things to conquer. He'll rummage through your drawers, empty out laundry baskets, discover the pots and pans, and conduct elaborate experiments on everything he finds. (Make safety a priority when he sets off to explore.) He'll never tire of dropping, rolling, throwing, opening, closing, or waving objects to find out how they behave. He is very busy discovering how his world works. One of the biggest discoveries is the concept of object permanence. Just like his emotional understanding of separation from his parents, so too are his toys no longer out of sight, out of mind. His favourite game becomes peek-a-boo.

As he approaches his first birthday, your child will become increasingly conscious that things not only have names but that they also have particular functions. Suddenly you notice him holding the toy phone to his ear and babbling away conversationally, just like you do. You can encourage important developmental activities like this by offering him suggestive props like a pot and spoon for stirring, a cup to drink from, a hairbrush or toothbrush, and by being an enthusiastic audience for his mimicking performances.