



# What to Expect During Your Baby's First Month

**T**he first month of your baby's life is full of changes. Many new parents have questions about how to help your new arrival settle into the family. Here are some of the basics to expect during the first month of life. Remember that every baby is unique. Check with your pediatrician if you have questions or concerns about your baby's development.

## What Baby Can Do, Months 1-2

### Visual

- Prefers human face
- Focuses on things 8-12 inches away
- Eyes may be crossed occasionally
- Prefers high-contrast colors and black & white

### Hearing

- Hearing is well-developed
- Prefers familiar sounds and voices
- Recognizes some sounds like parents' voices

### Smell, Touch & Taste

- If breast-fed, recognizes smell of mother's breast milk
- Prefers sweet smells and tastes over bitter or acidic ones
- Prefers soft sensations & handling over rough or abrupt ones

### Movement

- Grasps an object placed in the hand
- Turns head in the direction of a touch on the cheek
- Makes stepping movements if held upright with feet touching a hard surface
- Little control of arm, hand, and leg movements
- Head will flop back if unsupported

*Remember that these milestones are just averages. Every baby develops at a different rate. Consult with your baby's doctor if you have questions about your baby's development.*

**The Neonatal Period** The first month of life is called the neonatal period. During this time your baby will probably have reddish, wrinkled skin and tightly curled hands. She may have an elongated or bumpy head due to coming through the birth canal during delivery (unless you had a C-section). She may breathe noisily at first because she's just learning how to breathe.

You have probably noticed the soft spot on top of your baby's head where the skull bones have not yet joined. This is normal. Baby's skull was soft to allow the head to pass through the birth canal. Although the soft spot is covered by tough membrane, you need to avoid bumping or hitting baby's head. Washing and rubbing will not harm the baby's head. Massaging the scalp keeps baby's head clean, especially if "cradle cap" occurs. Cradle cap looks like scaly, dandruff-like patches on baby's scalp. It can usually be removed by massaging her scalp with baby oil, and then washing with baby shampoo and a washcloth.

The soft spot may look flat or slightly depressed when your baby sits. When baby lies down, it may become slightly rounded. This is normal, but a severe depression or bulge may signal dehydration or swelling. Your doctor will check the soft spot during your regular visits. You can expect the soft spot to disappear as the skull bones grow together between 12 and 18 months.

**Seeing and Hearing** Your baby's hearing is already well developed at birth. Within a few hours, he may already recognize his mom's voice. His vision is still developing in the early months. He can distinguish light from dark, and sees objects best when they are about 8 to 12 inches away. Babies especially enjoy looking at other faces, so talk and sing face-to-face. Your baby can only use one eye at a time right now, so don't be surprised if his eyes cross. This is normal and will likely correct itself within a few months.

**Reflexes** Babies are born with some amazing abilities. If you touch your fingertip lightly to your baby's cheek, she will turn her head in that direction and will probably try to suck on your finger. This is called the sucking reflex. If you put your finger in her palm, her fingers will close tightly around it. Your baby will also react to loud noises or to a prick on the bottom of her feet. These reflexes help your baby get food, stay safe, and explore the world around her.

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**Sleeping** Don't be surprised if your new baby sleeps as much as 18 to 22 hours each day. His sleep patterns may be irregular at first as he adjusts to his new world. Short naps, followed by short periods of being awake, are very normal for newborns. As he grows, his sleep patterns will become more regular.

*Babies need safe places to sleep. Put your baby on his back on a firm mattress in a crib, cradle, or bassinet.* Make sure the crib openings between the side slats are no wider than three fingers, the mattress fits snugly against the crib sides, and the headboard and footboard don't have openings that could trap a baby. New baby cribs are much safer than older cribs, which may have lead-based paint. Pillows, stuffed animals, and other soft objects are suffocation hazards. Keep them out of your baby's crib. The best way to keep your baby warm is to dress him in warm pajamas or sleepers. Don't over-bundle him in too many clothes and blankets. Make sure blankets stay away from his face.

**Crying** When your baby is a newborn, crying is her only way to communicate. Newborn babies may cry as much as two hours every day. Babies cry when they are hungry, sleepy, uncomfortable, or need a diaper changed. As your baby gets older, she may also cry because she wants attention. As a parent, you will learn your baby's different cries and what she wants when she cries.

*Respond to your baby's needs every time she cries. Picking up a baby when she cries will not spoil her.* Babies need to know that they can trust their parents to take care of their needs. Responding quickly and calmly when your baby cries teaches her that her world is safe and predictable.

Some babies develop colic as early as the second to fourth week after birth. A crying, irritable infant may be one sign. Because colic usually cramps the intestine, babies with colic usually tense their muscles and draw up their legs. Doctors are not sure what causes colic. It may be caused by an immature digestive system or an allergic reaction to food. If you are breast-feeding, try eliminating one food at a time from your diet to see if your baby cries less. For severe cases, your doctor may suggest medication. Colic is usually outgrown by 3 to 6 months of age.

**Exploring the World** From the time they are born, babies are curious about the world around them. You can help your baby learn about her environment. Hold her, pat her, and cuddle her. This will help your baby feel more secure and learn to trust. Use soft tones of voice. Read books out loud, starting as soon as she is born. Reading helps babies learn language, and snuggling in your lap while you read helps her feel safe and secure.

Feeding is an ideal time to talk and sing to your baby. Talking to your baby helps build your relationship, and helps him begin to recognize language. It's fine to repeat the same words and phrases over and over again. Repetition helps build connections in your baby's brain.

One of the first negative emotions a baby feels is fear. If she dislikes a bath, it may be because she is afraid of falling. As she learns to trust you to take good care of her and keep her safe, many of these fears will be overcome. Try to move into new activities gradually to give your baby time to adapt.

**The Bottom Line** Being a new parent is a learning experience, both for you and for your baby. Pay attention to your baby's signals. Respond warmly every time he cries. Take time to smile, laugh, and enjoy this wonderful new person. Appreciate all of the ways he is unique, and take pride in the new things he is learning to do. Above all, have fun with your baby.

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## What do you do if your baby won't stop crying?

Be sure to comfort him, even though you may feel stressed out yourself. A baby left to cry gulps more air and becomes tenser. Try laying your baby on his stomach across your knees and rubbing his back to lessen his discomfort.

Let him suck on a pacifier, walk with him, or play soothing music.

Some babies seem to calm down when riding in a car or when wrapped snugly in a blanket. Time spent comforting your baby is good for his emotional growth.



For more information, contact your FACS Cooperative Extension Agent at 1-800-ASK-UGA1 (275-8421) or visit: [www.gafamilies.org](http://www.gafamilies.org)

Contact your local Family and Consumer Sciences County Extension Agent for more information about ways to support your child's development and to receive *Baby Bouncer*, a monthly publication series about your baby's development during the first year (also available in Spanish).

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