

While your baby is busy growing taller, gaining weight, and cutting teeth, she is also learning how to interact physically with her environment.

Gross motor skills are governed by larger, stronger, less exacting muscles. These skills include holding up the head, sitting, crawling, and walking.

Fine Motor Control Cruising and Walking



After he can pull himself up to a stand by holding on a piece of furniture, he will start to "cruise." Cruising consists of steps while holding onto the furniture for support. At first, he will probably face the furniture and shuffle sideways. As he gains confidence in his balance,

he will slide one hand as he walks in a forward direction. Cruising usually begins in the ninth month, but can begin as early as seven and a half months and as late as twelve and a half months.

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When your child bravely lets go of the furniture and takes his first solo steps, walking has begun. This milestone of development is as exciting for you as it is for your child. Walking with or without assistance usually occurs by a baby's first birthday, and most babies walk well by fourteen months of age.

Your baby will quickly grow more nimble and confident. By eighteen months, he will be able to walk backward. Between fourteen and twenty-four months, he will learn to walk up stairs, though it may be a couple of months longer until he can confidently walk down the stairs. At eighteen months, he will be able to run stiffly. In just a few months more, he will not look as precarious as he runs towards you.

BABY GIFTS & GIFT BASKETS

Motor responses are general at first. Later, they become more specific. For example, if you hold a toy in front of your baby when she is three months old, she may smile, wave her arms and legs, and finally make an attempt to swipe at the toy with one or both arms. A few months later, she may still smile at the toy, but she will quickly, smoothly, and deliberately grasp it with one hand.

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Fine Motor Control: Coordinating Hand to Eye

As your newborn looks about her world, her own fisted hand randomly passes through her field of vision. This strange object may interest her, but she has no idea of what it is or how it got there. By compelling her arm to extend in front of her face when she turns her head to the side, the tonic neck reflex creates plenty of opportunity for her to study her hand. During the first six weeks, she devotes more and more time to her own fisted hand.

As the grasp reflex fades, she is increasingly able to unclench her fist. Similarly, her body unwinds from its flexed position. As the tonic neck reflex disappears, she

spends more time looking up rather than looking to the side when she lies on her back. Hand to mouth activity, which began as a reflex at birth, becomes a more deliberate, conscious act. She moves her hands over her chest where she can look at them, explore them with her mouth, and finger one with the other.

Until three months of age, she will look at things without touching them and finger objects absently without looking at them. Then, the two systems for examining the world fuse. She sees something and turns her head to see what it is. She sees something interesting and reaches out to learn more about it by touch.

Her first attempts at hand contact consist of broad swipes. Her entire hand sweeps in a grand gesture as she bats at, and occasionally contacts, an object. The coordination of her arms begins closest to her body-at the shoulder. At six to fourteen weeks, sturdy objects suspended within an arm's length of your baby make good toys.

After this swiping period, you may notice that your baby begins to make slow, labored attempts to reach out and touch an object with one or both hands. If you watch carefully, you might see her glance back and forth between the object and

her hand as she calculates the remaining distance. Having not yet mastered the correct sequence for grasping, she may close her fist before she reaches the object. During this time [between fourteen and twenty-three weeks], try to be patient when you hand her a toy. Give her plenty of time as she laboriously tries to reach out and grasp it. Practicing this sort of hand-eye coordination is important for her development.

My First Teddy Bear



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Between four and six and a half months, she will have mastered the ability to smoothly lift her hand and accurately grasp an object. This is the time to introduce toys that make things happen-toys that help her learn cause and effect [such as squeaky ducks, or spinning bathtub toys].

During the six through eight months, your baby will avidly explore everything in sight with her eyes, hands, and mouth. She will use both hands simultaneously to explore objects; while holding an object in each hand, for instance, she may delight in banging the two together. Given a small block, she will be able to transfer it from one hand to the other.

At six months, most babies can deliberately, but perhaps awkwardly let go of an object. By ten months, your baby will be quite adept at uncurling her fingers at will to release an object. Over and over, she will grasp something and drop it for the sheer pleasure of watching it fall. For a while she will rely on you to retrieve these objects.

Between eight and fourteen months, your baby may spend long periods of time examining small objects. She will learn to prod an object with a single index finger. Rather than raking at things with her whole hand, she will begin to oppose her thumb and index finger in a "pincer grasp" to pick up a small object. At first your baby may need to steady her hand against a firm surface as she learns the pincer grasp. By her first birthday, your child will be an expert at plucking the smallest crumbs from the kitchen floor.

Your doctor will be keeping track of when your baby masters these motor skills.