

Baby's first step is a developmental milestone that most parents never forget. But waiting for this moment can be an anxious time for parents who may have friends and relatives whose children walked at an earlier age.

## Gross Motor Development: Controlling the Big Muscles

### Head Control



The first motor hurdle your infant must clear is to gain control over his relatively large head. If you imagine trying to lift your head while balancing a huge, unabridged dictionary on top of it, you will have some idea of the challenge facing your baby. He will spend the first three or four months learning to control his head movements.

Gradually, his neck muscles will strengthen and his head will become less wobbly. In the meantime, you will need to support his head when you pick him up. By three months he will be able to control his head when gently pulled up to sit, though his head will still bob a little if you hold him in a sitting position. By four to six months, his head doesn't fall backward as you sit him up; and once sitting, he can hold his head steady.

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Despite the head's relatively large size, your healthy newborn can raise his head long enough to move it from side to side when lying on his stomach. Hence, he can avoid suffocation. Over the next three months he will develop enough strength to lift his head ninety degrees away from a flat surface. Between two and four months, if his arms are extended in front of his chest, he can raise his head and chest above a surface.

### Sitting

## BABY GIFTS & GIFT BASKETS

Wait to buy shoes until your child starts to walk. Research suggests that children develop healthy, well-developed feet when they learn to walk barefoot. Keep their feet toasty and unrestricted with soft booties or warm skid-free socks. There are a lot of different brands that makes thin but warm leather moccasins in a range of colors and sizes that actually stay on little crawlers' feet. They are awesome for children who are just learning how to walk.

[Baby Gifts and Gift Baskets](#) provides timely and practical information for new moms, as well as gift ideas for pregnancy, baby showers, and to celebrate birth:

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As your baby gains strength progressively down his torso to his hips, he will be able to sit. Around four months of age, he will be able to sit with support for ten to fifteen minutes. At this point, he will enjoy sitting with his back supported by an infant seat, pillows, or friendly hands. Stroller rides become much more fun because he is able to sit up and observe the world. He may even enjoy brief outings in a baby backpack. During meals, he can sit in a highchair with a pillow or blanket supporting the lower part of his back.

Between five and seven and a half months, if you set him down with his legs spread apart, he will be able to sit alone. You may still want to put pillows or blanket rolls around him to pad his fall should he topple over. For a while, he will still need to lean forward on his hands to maintain his sitting posture. But soon he will be able to balance, freeing his hands to finger interesting objects. By nine months he will be able to push himself into a sitting position. His increasing independence will give him hours of delight as he sits and plays with his toys.

### Rolling Over

Rolling represents your baby's first whole-body maneuver and his first means of locomotion. As the tonic neck reflex fades, his arm no longer automatically extends as he turns his head. When he has enough control over his head, torso and legs, he can tuck his arm under himself and roll. His weighty head initiates the rotation.

At about three months, babies start to turn by rolling to their sides. Between four and six months your baby will probably first roll from his stomach to his back. A month or so later, he will master rolling in both directions. Never leave a baby of

any age unattended on a raised surface, as even young infants can accidentally flip themselves over.

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### Crawling

During the same time your baby is learning to sit, he may also start to crawl. The onset of crawling is extremely variable. Some babies prefer to bounce along on their buttocks from a sitting position. A few babies seem to decide that they would rather omit crawling and proceed directly to walking.

If crawling is to occur, first attempts can begin as early as five months of age. If yours is a very active baby, he may then travel by half rolling and half pushing himself in the desired direction. He may start to crawl at seven months.

The average baby begins by creeping in the six or seventh month. Because a baby's arms are stronger and better coordinated than his legs, he may drag himself around by pushing with his arms,

dragging his legs behind. His first progress may be in a backward direction. Later, he will be able to dig in with his toes and knees. By eight months, he will probably be scooting about on hands and knees in the traditional crawl position.

Once crawling begins, your child will be jubilantly exploring all the things in the house he had to passively view from a distance for so long. He will be able to entertain himself for longer periods. The trade off is that you will have to be especially vigilant about his activities. You must "baby proof" your house [check for safety hazards] before your baby can navigate on his own. He may be as curious about the electrical outlets in your house as he is about toys.

### Standing

Between three and six months, your baby will bear some weight on his legs when you stand him up. At first, he will stiffly lock his legs. A few weeks later, he will bounce by bending and straightening his legs. Check to see if he can stand with his feet flat; "toe walking" may be a sign that he is bearing his weight on his legs too early.

Your baby may begin pulling himself to a standing position as early as six months or as late as ten months. Most babies pull to a stand between the eighth and ninth months. You can help your baby by providing him with stable objects that won't topple over with his weight. Surrounding him with pillows will help cushion him if he falls; but keep an eye out to make sure he doesn't suffocate.

At first, he will be delighted with his upright posture. Happy gurgles may turn to wails of despair, though, when he discovers that he doesn't know how to sit back down. He can help him learn to sit by sliding his hands down the supporting object to lower his buttocks to the floor.

By the eleventh month, your child will probably be able to stand well alone. About this same time, he may get himself to a stand by bending his knees and pushing off from a squatting position.