



PARENTING WITH SUCCESS NEWSLETTER

From 4 to 6 Months



YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT

FROM 4 TO 6 MONTHS

Brain Development

Look for your baby to:

- Explore objects with his or her mouth
- Use reaching, grasping and batting to explore objects
- Examine objects with his or her eyes
- Recognize his or her name

Here's what you can do:

- Provide opportunities to reach, grasp and bat objects
- Remember that much of baby's first learning comes from exploring with the mouth
- Remember that your baby is storing vast amounts of information into his or her brain. Provide stimulation for all of your baby's senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste
- Keep talking and singing to your child!
- Place a child-approved unbreakable mirror in crib or hold baby in front of a mirror
- Provide objects and toys with lots of stimulating color and motion
- Give baby supervised tummy time on a bright quilt or blanket with a variety of textures
- This is an important time for baby's visual development. Provide opportunities for baby to focus on objects and to follow objects side to side, up and down, and in and out. (Focusing on a television or other electronic screen DOES NOT help with baby's eye development!)
- Take baby outside and out in the world

PREMATURE BABIES

If your baby was born earlier than expected, developmental milestones may be "off schedule" a bit. Don't be concerned if your premature baby isn't doing all of these things yet. You may need to save this newsletter for a few weeks and then check again.

Language Development

Look for your baby to:

- Enjoy sounds
- Recognize the voices of important people
- Begin to make consonant sounds like "buh""dah""mah"
- Experiment with sounds by making noise with her or his saliva or clicking sounds with the tongue
- Watch your mouth when you talk and try to imitate
- Initiate "conversation" by making noises and waiting for you to respond

Here's what you can do:

- Use self talk — talk to your baby about what you are doing
- Use parallel talk — describe what your baby is doing, seeing, hearing
- Show things to your baby and name them
- Provide toys that make sounds
- Play music for your baby
- Imitate your baby's attempts at making sounds
- Show simple books or pictures to your baby and talk about them
- Call attention to baby's nose, toes, etc.



Social-Emotional Development

Look for your baby to:

- Recognize family members and other significant people
- Cry to have needs met
- Smile on purpose
- Enjoy your undivided attention and affection (with the TV and other electronic media OFF!)
- Giggle and laugh
- Stop crying when you approach or show delight by moving or kicking when familiar people approach

Here's what you can do:

- Provide lots of eye contact, especially when feeding or playing with baby
- Let baby know from your voice, face and your touch that you love him or her
- Babies whose cries are answered quickly actually cry less; you cannot spoil a baby of this age
- Baby still needs lots of sucking; allow her or him to suck thumb, fingers or pacifier
- Play simple "social" games like peek-a-boo or patty cake
- Feeding time is learning time; hold baby when feeding — do not prop bottle (propping or putting baby to bed with a bottle is a choking hazard and can harm ears and teeth)
- Play gentle tickling games

Physical Development

Look for your baby to:

- Push and kick with both legs
- Roll to one side or from back to stomach or stomach to back
- Sit with head steady, while supported
- Use hands and fingers to explore toys by reaching, grasping and batting
- Track with eyes vertically, horizontally and in a circular motion
- When on tummy, lift head and chest and use arms for support
- Kick vigorously

Here's what you can do:

- Use a crib gym or floor gym to encourage reaching and batting. Remember that toys stretched across crib rails should be used only with supervision
- Give baby lots of supervised floor time to encourage stretching and kicking, which strengthens muscles
- Encourage rolling by placing baby on his or her side
- Start thinking about childproofing your home
- Use exersaucers or jumperoos. Baby will enjoy being upright, but for limited periods of time and not more than two hours a day. Bones and muscles are not developed enough for long periods of these activities. Use extreme caution with baby walkers.

ALL BABIES ARE DIFFERENT

All babies develop at their own rates. Notice your child's growth in each area so you can encourage each new stage. Your job is to provide opportunities for your child to learn new things when he or she is ready, without being pushed or pressured. If you have concerns, contact your health care provider or the family life education office at Avera, 605-322-3660.



LET'S MAKE IT SAFE

PRODUCT RECALLS

All parents should monitor recalls of children's products (toys, equipment, clothing, etc). We recommend the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which will either email you periodic updates on product recalls or send a newsletter by mail. Visit cpsc.gov

CHILDPROOFING

As your baby gets ready for mobility, it's time to think about childproofing. Remember, nothing is really childPROOF, but there are steps you can take to make the environment safe for exploration. Get down on your hands and knees and inspect your home from your baby's perspective.

Between 4 and 6 months there are three main areas of concern:

Small or Sharp Items

Anything baby can reach will go into the mouth and can pose a choking hazard. Keep floors and tables clear of objects that are dangerous for babies. Some of these might be popcorn, twist ties, dust balls, coins, paper clips, staples, balloons, small balls, pet food or anything smaller than 1 ¾ inches. Inspect toys often. Even safe toys become a hazard when broken.

Parents should learn about basic first aid and what to do if their infant chokes. There may be a class in your community or online.

Electrical Items

Cover unused electrical outlets with plastic plugs designed for that purpose. Consider special outlet plates for outlets being used. Keep lamp cords or other electrical cords hidden behind furniture (not under rugs) to prevent baby from chewing on them.

Poisons

Use child safety locks on any cupboards with dangerous chemical or other items. If possible, move these items to a higher location. Remember — many children figure out how to operate "child proof" devices. Some plants are poisonous. Contact your county extension office or sdsafetycouncil.org for a list of these plants. Post the number for the Poison Control Center by your phone: 800-222-1222.

Learn more:

- [Poison Prevention Guidelines](#)
- [Toy Safety](#)
- [Preventing Suffocation and Strangulation](#)

Other Concerns:

Keep window blind cords out of baby's reach. These are a strangulation hazard. Do not put baby's crib near a window blind or drapery cord.

Keep plastic bags and dry cleaning plastic out of baby's reach. These are a suffocation hazard. Now may be the time to think about stairway safety. Parents will need to place safety gates on all open stairs as their baby becomes mobile.

As physical strength develops, baby will start to wiggle and lean forward in an infant seat. It is probably time to put away the infant seat and look at other options.

Baby walkers were removed from the market for a time due to injuries caused by the walker collapsing, the walker causing babies to fall down stairs, and finger injuries from hinge mechanisms. Baby walkers also gave babies increased mobility, giving him or her more access to dangerous objects and situations.

Stationary activity centers without wheels (saucers, rigid baby seats, jumperoos, etc.) may be a better alternative. These items give baby a chance to be upright for a time without increasing mobility and access to danger.

Whatever option you choose, limit time of usage to two hours per day to protect neck muscles and foot development. Babies still need lots of floor time for physical development. Too much upright time does not follow the natural sequence of development.

LET'S MAKE IT SAFE cont.

FIRE SAFETY

With a new baby in the house, it's time to rethink your home fire safety plan. Develop a plan that includes escape routes from any room your baby might be in at any time of the day. Make sure smoke detectors are working and batteries are ALWAYS charged and in place. Use fire retardant clothing and bedding for your baby.

[Learn more: Burn Prevention](#)

HIGH CHAIR SAFETY

- High chairs should be sturdy with a wide base to avoid tipping easily. Be very cautious about hand-me-down high chairs or those purchased from garage sales and thrift stores. These may not meet current safety standards.
- The chair should have a seat belt and a crotch strap to go between baby's legs. This keeps baby from sliding out.
- The tray should be free of sharp edges and should lock securely on both sides.
- Check the seat to make sure it is not slippery, allowing baby to slide out. You can use plastic bathtub stickers if this is an issue.
- Trays that come out and can go in the dishwasher are best. Trays should be cleaned thoroughly after each use.
- Feeding seats are another option. Make sure the seat is securely strapped to a chair with a wide leg base for stability.

BATH SAFETY

Whether you use the kitchen sink, a special baby bathtub or the big bathtub, keep in mind these safety tips for bathing your baby:

- Water temperature should not be greater than 100 degrees F. Your water heater should be turned to a medium setting (120 degrees F) to avoid scald burns. Even if you use a bath thermometer of some type, always check with your hands as well.
- Keep the water shallow. A baby can drown in less than 2 inches of water.
- Hold the baby securely at all times. Babies at this age are very wiggly and slippery! Never leave a baby unattended in the tub for any length of time.
- Adults should make sure they bend from the knee, not the waist and use the stronger leg muscles when leaning over a tub. Lift, then twist; avoid lifting and twisting at the same time.

[Learn more: Drowning Prevention](#)



HEALTH HINTS

LITTLE BODIES NEED BIG NUTRITION

Starting Solids

Your health care provider can advise you on when to start solids. Generally, a baby should meet all criteria before starting on solid food:

- Able to sit with support
- Good head and neck control
- Shows an interest in food
- Is able to keep some food in the mouth (loss of tongue thrust reflex)
- Doubled birth weight (or at least 13 pounds)
- Taking more than 32 ounces of formula or more than 8-10 breastfeedings and still acting hungry

The first solid foods for babies are traditionally baby cereal. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, you can introduce solid foods in any order you like. First foods can also be things like pureed avocado, sweet potato and banana. Try one new food at a time, and wait a few days to help spot potential allergies.

Once your baby is ready to move beyond pureed food, the AAP recommends exposing him or her to a variety of healthy foods, and a variety of textures and flavors. Avoid home prepared spinach, beets, green

beans, squash and carrots in the first six months; these may contain high levels of nitrates that a baby cannot yet handle. You can use commercially prepared versions of these foods. Do not use well water to prepare foods for babies under 6 months.

When you make your own baby food, avoid excess salt or sweeteners and make sure it has a very smooth consistency. Check with your health care provider about iron and vitamin D supplements or if you have questions about your baby's diet.

Do not feed cereal or other food in a bottle, even if the bottle is advertised for feeding solids. This is a choking hazard and does not teach baby to use the tongue to move food to the back of the mouth.

Even when babies begin eating solids, they still need breastmilk or formula until one year of age.

WARNING: Honey is harmful to babies. Do not feed honey to babies until they are at least 12 months of age. A young baby's immature immune system and intestinal tract cannot handle a harmful spore that can be present in honey.

[Learn more: Feeding Guide for Healthy Infants](#) and [Children's Nutrition Guidelines](#)

THINKING ABOUT GUIDANCE AND DISCIPLINE

Remember, your baby cries or fusses because he or she needs something. You really can't spoil a baby who is under 6 months of age. A quick response teaches your baby to trust you and strengthens your relationship. Research shows that babies whose needs are met quickly, stop crying sooner and actually cry less later on.

Sometimes baby does things that may annoy you. Remember that your baby's brain hasn't developed enough to be able to obey you. Being gentle and calm will help more than anything. Yelling or slapping hands will only confuse baby. Baby doesn't do things to bother you on purpose.



DENTAL HEALTH

Many babies get their first tooth around 6 months of age. Usually the lower front teeth are the first. It's not too early to begin practicing good dental hygiene with your baby. As soon as your baby gets a first tooth, begin a routine of wiping the baby's teeth and gums with a soft, moist wash cloth or gauze square several times a day. Start by wiping the front of the mouth to get baby used to the feeling. Gradually work your way farther back until baby gets used to having all areas of the mouth cleaned. For more information on infant and child dental health, visit americandentalassociation.org

BABY'S HEARING

Be aware that if your child has an ear infection, it can impact developing hearing abilities. If you think your child has an ear infection, see your health care provider for advice.

LEAD POISONING

Homes built before 1980 may have painted surfaces that contain lead. When babies chew on these painted surfaces or touch paint dust and put their fingers in their mouths, they can ingest lead and develop lead poisoning. Lead poisoning can reduce memory, intelligence, concentration and hearing. It cannot be cured, only prevented.

For more information on lead poisoning in children, how to clean your home if it has lead painted surfaces, what to do if your water pipes contain lead and other ideas for prevention, go to cdc.gov/healthyhomes or surgeongeneral.gov. You can also ask your health care provider for advice.

MOMMIES MATTER; DADS DO, TOO

Focusing on Each Other

With all the busyness and stress of a new baby in the house, it is easy for new parents to neglect their relationship with each other. Well adjusted babies have parents who show love and respect for each other. You may have to work to find time to do things to strengthen your relationship as a couple.

- Schedule a "date" each week. Find someone you trust to care for your baby while you take a walk, go on a picnic, watch a movie or do a fun activity together.
- Remember to show your affection for each other physically (hugs and kisses) and verbally (complimenting each other).
- Find time each day to talk to each other, even if it's only 10 minutes.
- If things are bothering you, talk them out rather than keeping them bottled up inside.



BABY PLAYTIME

CHILDCARE DECISIONS

Choosing Childcare

If your child will be in someone else's care while you work, you need to choose the care environment wisely. Your child will be spending a large part of his waking hours in this environment, so this decision is very important. There are many types of childcare available: family or group home childcare, centers, care by a friend or relative and in-home care (nanny).

Find a childcare referral resource in your area. In the Sioux Falls area, you can contact helplinecenter.org or dial 211. They can provide information on childcare available in this area. You can also ask friends, relatives and other parents for ideas.

Visit the childcare home or center and ask questions. Bring a list of things you want to know:

- Is the childcare required to be licensed?
- Do the caregivers have any education or training in child development?
- What is the ratio of children to adults?
- How much turnover of staff is there?
- Has the facility been inspected for safety?
- What types of meals will be served?
- What kinds of toys and activities are available?
- How much time is spent watching television or with other electronic screens?
- Do you feel the caregiver is easy to talk with and was able to answer your questions?

When you make a choice, use your research, but also trust your instincts. Check references of other parents who have used this childcare. Choose the childcare that you feel will be best for your child.

LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

Getting Ready to Move

Rolling, crawling and pulling to stand are just around the corner. To encourage this development, baby needs lots of floor time. Put a toy just out of reach to encourage baby to move to try to reach it. This works best if you are on the floor and involved by smiling and giving encouraging words.

Your baby will be interested in anything safe that she can reach, grasp, look at, chew or suck. Baby may use rolling as a way to get things. Toys that make noises will also be interesting at this stage. Babies are very interested in textures, so be sure to provide a variety of interesting (but safe!) things to feel.

Continue to read to your baby each day. Colorful books with only a few words per page are best. Baby may want to grab or chew on the books. Use special baby books made of hardboard so she or he can handle them.

