



AGE EIGHT MONTHS TO TWELVE MONTHS

SAFETY FIRST!

WATCH OUT! During this period your baby will become increasingly mobile. Danger will lurk behind every corner! This is a development that will both thrill you and challenge you. Make sure your home is fully childproofed before he reaches this stage. This will allow your child a greater sense of freedom.

One of the skills of parenting becomes obvious during this stage. You need to know when to guide your child and when to let him do things for himself. This is a true art. Obviously if your child is frustrated (a toy is not reachable) you will need to intervene, but don't let your impatience cause you to intervene more than is necessary. For example, it may be quicker and less messy to feed your nine month old, but by doing so, you are depriving him of a chance to learn a valuable new skill.

The more opportunities you can give him to discover, test and strengthen his new capabilities, the more confident and adventuresome he will be!

PHYSICAL APPEARANCE AND GROWTH

By his first birthday, the average child has **TRIPLED** his birth weight and is 28-32 inches tall. Remember though, it is following the growth chart that is important and not the actual numbers. When your baby first begins standing, his posture will be far from what Emily Post would say is perfect. His belly will be protuberant, his bottom will stick out, and his back will have a forward curve to it. This is normal. As well at this stage your child will appear flat-footed as he has a fat pad hiding the arch. In 2-3 years this fat pad will disappear and his arch will magically appear. This is a natural occurrence and does not depend on what shoes he wears.

MOVEMENT

By 8 months your baby will be sitting on his own, and will often be reaching to the sides for objects. Your baby will not want to remain still for long during this phase. He can flip over at will, and hence falls become a reality. **NEVER** leave your baby unattended on a change table etc. Between 7 and 10 months your baby will usually start to crawl. It is important to realize that some babies will never crawl, but learn to get around in other ways. Some babies are "bum shufflers", and scoot around the house on their bottoms. This is also completely normal, and does **NOT** reflect any development problems (now or later). Stairs become a real danger at this stage and hence **ALL** stairways should have appropriate secure gates.

Crawling may be good, but it won't satisfy your baby for long! Everyone else is standing, and soon he will want to stand too. Initially he will pull to stand using your hand, leg and furniture, etc. Then he will start cruising around the furniture. Once he starts to feel secure, he will attempt tentative steps. Be prepared for the bumps and bruises. Attempt to prevent as many as possible, but when they do happen, if the injury is only mild, offer a quick hug and let your baby go back to what they were doing. If you are not overly phased, then your baby won't be either.

DO NOT BE TEMPTED at this time (or earlier) to use an infant walker. These devices have clearly been shown to actually **DELAY WALKING**, and are also a significant danger (even if you don't have stairs). Baby walkers are illegal in Canada and Australia, and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that **PARENTS NOT USE INFANT WALKERS**.

Again, expensive shoes are not necessary. The only function of shoes is to protect the sole of the foot. The best way to learn to walk is barefoot. Babies do not need arch supports, inserts, wedges, high-backs, etc.



FINE MOTOR SKILLS

With all of the excitement of walking, etc don't overlook what your baby is now able to do with his hands. At the beginning of this period he will still use a raking grasp, but by the end he will be mastering a fine two finger pincer grasp. He will practice this pincer movement with everything from cheerios to dust balls. He will love to place objects into a container and then take them out and then do it again and again and again. His fine motor coordination will also improve and you will now catch him investigating objects with great intensity. He will love soft toys with moving parts, lever, and hinges and holes that he can poke his fingers through.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Earlier coos and gurgles are now giving way to recognizable syllables - ma, ba, da, ga, etc. Your baby's receptive language is far advanced at this point compared to his expressive language. You can often mention a favourite toy and he will look toward it. Continue to talk to him as much as possible. Be consistent with your verbal labels.

Picture books play a valuable role in language development. Choose books with large simple pictures. Board, cloth or vinyl books are best, so that your baby can turn the pages himself and even taste them! Remember, when you are reading or talking to him, give your baby plenty of opportunities to join in. Ask lots of questions and wait for a reply. Repeat back to him what he says. These exchanges may seem meaningless, but they let your baby know that communication is a two way process. His initial words will also usually not be grammatically correct. But if 'muck' consistently means 'milk', then muck should be treated with all the respect of the legitimate word. When you speak back to him however, you should use the correct word 'milk'. Remember, there is marked variability in the attainment of new sounds and words between children, and the speech of most 12 month old children consists of gibberish that has the tones and inflections of legible speech. Some babies who hear two languages consistently, may have their initial words delayed somewhat, but this is normal, and the final results are well worth the little delay now. Please speak to us if you are concerned about whether to continue with both languages.

We are fortunate in Bermuda, that all babies receive a very sensitive hearing screen at birth, and so we can pick up those babies with congenital hearing loss at birth. Previously, it was around 12-18 months when we could pick these up.

However, if we are concerned about your child's speech development, we may want to repeat the hearing test to make sure there isn't conductive loss (fluid behind eardrums) that could be affecting how sounds are heard - we can see this in children who have had frequent ear infections or persistent middle ear fluid after an infection.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Toy stores will have all of the latest educational toys for your baby, but remember that most of the best toys can be found in your own home. Your baby will explore every nook and cranny that he can, rummaging through drawers, emptying wastebaskets, etc. Although this play may seem haphazard, your baby is examining these new situations with the intensity of a scientist. From his observations he is developing theories about shapes (what objects roll, etc), textures and sizes.

By 12 months your baby will also be learning the function of some objects. For example, that toy telephone initially only tasted good, but now you may see your baby place the receiver to his ear just as he has seen you do.

Appropriate toys for this age would include:

Stacking toys in different shapes and sizes, cups, pails and other unbreakable items, bath toys that float, squirt or hold water, large building blocks, squeeze toys or balls, tapes, CD's and musical toys, push-pull toys, and walking toys (NOT walkers).



EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

During this period, your baby begins to differentiate familiar from unfamiliar. Therefore his behaviour may change abruptly as well. He may be calm and outgoing at one moment, and then switch to suddenly being clingy and frightened. We will often experience this during the 12 month visit, when your baby becomes upset at my approach (he could also remember the 'ouchies'). Really though, this is the beginning of stranger and separation anxiety - a stage that can cause significant parental anxiety as well, especially when your once mild mannered baby starts fussing at daycare or with a babysitter or grandma!

How can you help your baby and you through separation anxiety?

- Hunger and tiredness will make a baby more susceptible to separation anxiety, therefore schedule your departure after he is napped and fed
- Don't fuss over your leaving
- Remember that his tears will subside within minutes of your leaving
- Do short little separation exercises at home i.e. when he ventures into a new child-proofed room, don't follow him immediately; if you have to get something from another room, tell him where you are going and that you will return. If he fusses, don't run back immediately, call him instead.

FEEDING

By this age, your baby will be taking approximately 750-900 calories per day, with about half of these coming from breast milk or formula. His rate of growth has slowed down, so his appetite may not be as robust as previously.

Around 8 months you can introduce "junior foods", which are slightly more coarse than strained foods. There are very few foods your baby can't have at this time - they include obvious choking hazards such as nuts, popcorn, hotdogs and honey. Honey can contain botulism spores.

Experiment with different foods and chunkiness, so that by 12 months, he is beginning to eat mostly the same food as us. You can also let him experiment with feeding himself either with his fingers or a spoon - don't expect miracles with the spoon at the beginning and be ready for the mess. You will have some great photo opportunities with these first attempts.

Now is the time to start making the move to a cup as well. Remember, no bottles of milk or juice just before or during bedtime as this can cause major dental cavities.

SLEEPING

At 8 months, your baby will probably still be taking two regular naps, and may be sleeping as much as 12 hours at night. With the appearance of separation anxiety, you may see some sleep issues develop, with new difficulties going down to bed or waking at night. These can be normal at this stage, and we do not want to introduce "habits" that can cause these awakenings to persist or worsen. So try not to feed him or bring him into your bed. Instead comfort him, let him know that you're there, and then allow him to learn to put himself off to sleep again.



DISCIPLINE (REMEMBER THIS MEANS TO DISCIPLINE OR TEACH)

Your baby's desire to explore is almost insatiable. As a result his curiosity is going to get him into situations that could be dangerous or unwanted. Keep in mind that the way you handle these early incidents will lay the foundation for future discipline. At this age, DISTRACTION, is a great method for getting his interest off of grandma's antique vase and onto something more appropriate. Repeatedly saying no only serves to blunt its effect. Instead save this for when he is doing something that could be dangerous to him - in those situations say "NO" firmly and then remove him from the situation. Remember he has a short term memory so you will need to do this time and time again. Remember you must be consistent and you must be immediate for him to eventually realize a cause and effect. Also remember to catch him being good, and praise him for appropriate behaviour. If you make your child aware now of how much you appreciate the good things he does, he will be less likely to misbehave later just to get your attention.