



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



9 Months

INCREASING INDEPENDENCE

Your baby at 9–12 months

Babies use their actions and sounds to let you know what they want.

What your baby can do

Your baby understands more words than they can say:

- They are starting to understand what you say and can follow simple directions like "Go get the ball"
- They use sounds and body movements to tell you what they want. They may say a word or two like "dada"

Your baby knows that things still exist even when they cannot see them — including you:

- They may cry when you leave because they know you are still out there and want you to come back

What you can do

Tell your baby what is happening and what comes next. "After your milk, it will be time for a nap." This helps them learn language and know what to expect.

Put your baby's sounds and actions into words. "You are pushing your food away. I think you are telling me you are all done."

Name things your baby looks at or points to. "That is the moon. The moon comes out at night."

Play hide-and-seek games. This helps your baby learn that things that go away also come back.

Always say goodbye to your baby. Do not sneak out. This builds trust and helps them learn to handle being apart.

Every child grows at their own pace. Your baby may reach milestones faster or slower than other babies and still be growing just fine.

Your baby is on the move

Your baby has found their own way of getting around. They may crawl on hands and knees, scoot on their bottom, or move sideways. They may walk while holding onto furniture or your hand. Some babies may even start walking on their own.

Your baby also loves to do things over and over again. This is how they practice and figure out how things work. Doing things over and over also helps build memory.



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What you can do

Give your baby lots of time and a safe place to practice crawling and walking. Barefoot is best, because babies use their toes to grip the floor.

Make a trail of toys in a child-safe area. Line up a wooden spoon, a plastic bowl, or a colorful cloth for your baby to crawl to and explore.

Help your baby take the next step in play. If they are banging two blocks together, see if they want to try stacking them.

Offer a ball to toss or a rattle to shake. These help babies learn how things work, and they build the hand muscles your baby will use later for writing.

More things to know and try

- **Show your baby how “cause and effect” works.** Let them press the doorbell or turn on a light switch.
- **Follow your baby's lead** and let them explore things in their own way.
- **Help your baby use all their senses,** like touching an ice cube, crinkling leaves, or feeling new textures.
- **Childproof your home again.** Babies at this age have goals in mind and will go after what interests them.

At this visit

The care team will measure your baby's length, weight, and head size, and they will check their heart, eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Your healthcare provider will discuss vaccines with you at today's visit. The team will talk with you about your baby's growth, sleep, eating, and safety, and there will be time for any questions or concerns you have.

What comes next

Between 12 and 15 months, your baby may take their first steps on their own and become even more curious about the world around them. They will understand more words. They may begin using a few simple words with meaning. Many toddlers also start showing strong likes and dislikes and strong feelings as they build a sense of who they are.

Have more questions?

Talk to your baby's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

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