

WELCOME BABY Newsletter for 4 Months

Dear Parents,

Can you believe four months have flown by since your little baby was born? By now she is probably awake much more and beginning to watch everything you do. She listens, too, and is becoming quite social. Have you heard her laugh? Babies this age like to look around and see what's going on, who is entering the room and who is talking. They want you to smile at them and talk and sing and see how smart they are!

Your baby isn't the only one who is learning! Just think what has happened to you in the last few months, how much you have learned and grown and changed. This is an exciting time for parents, and hopefully not as exhausting as it was in the first few weeks after birth. Your baby's new interest and excitement in his world will seem amazing right now, but in a few weeks he'll settle down again and be more interested in eating and sleeping. This is a good time to begin rituals for sleep and bedtime that your baby can count on. When things are routine and predictable, your baby can settle down and feel more organized.

Your baby develops in the context of his relationships, first with you, his parents, and then with the wider circle of siblings, grandparents, family and friends. You are his base for security and love. Every time you comfort him when he's fussy, he builds a stronger connection to you and feels safe. Some **stranger awareness** may begin now; it is almost as if your baby says, "Who is this?" New people can disrupt his routine and surprise him. Your gentle touch and soft "cooing" words are soothing to him.

It is your relationship with her that provides the context for your baby to discover her world. As you introduce her to new people and things, a toy, a book, or a new pet, your gentle guidance allows her adjust gradually and smoothly; you'll both benefit. Your smile means a lot. Your baby is beginning to check you out to see if new situations and people are safe. You are her most important security blanket. You are also her favorite "toy".

The day with a four month old can seem very busy, but as you plan and schedule your time, for chores and work, loving and fun, you will feel more confident and in balance. **The schedule you keep can actually help your baby;** he can begin to count on a routine. When he can predict what is going to happen, he'll feel smart, indeed!



MEALTIME

Feeding your baby is about so much more than food; it is how you build your emotional bond. When you smile as you feed your baby, and your baby looks into your eyes, you are telling him he is safe, that he can trust you. You give your baby warm, sweet milk, and you say warm sweet words to him, "*There you go little pumpkin. Oh, my little sugar pie you are so sweet.*" This whole first year of baby's life is when your baby learns to trust you and mealtime is a wonderful way to build that trust.

But what does it mean when your baby pulls away from the breast or bottle and seems less interested in her meal? It might seem like you just got it all together for successful nursing and now your baby isn't interested. Watch her, what is she learning here? Four month old babies are beginning to be very good observers, they are curious; they don't want to miss anything. You might find it helpful to feed her with few distractions. Turn off the television or go to a quiet spot where you can both relax. If your baby doesn't eat enough during the day, she might be really hungry in the middle of the night! Try not to worry, in most cases babies by this age are very efficient nursers and can eat a surprising amount in a short time.

SLEEPTIME

Just when you think your baby is going to sleep longer, he wakes in the night again. What is happening? This smiling **baby is going through a big burst of cognitive growth**, in his mind he says, "*Hello world*".

If your baby seems really hungry in the night and was too busy to pay attention to her meal during the day, you can try to minimize distractions during daytime feedings and see if that helps. Or, perhaps your baby is **trying to learn to roll over**; if she's kicking a lot during the day that could be a clue.

It may be the **beginning of teething**; this long process may have already begun. When you check his gums, does he act like they are sore? Usually first teeth begin to appear between 6-9 months, but the process of teething goes on a long time.

Each new **developmental change is preceded by a time of disorganization** and babies can fuss and cry. New events and changes in growth can combine to disrupt his sleep – and yours. Just as we do, **babies cycle through periods of sleep and waking**. Your baby may not be wide awake when he cries out in the night and you might be able to encourage him to comfort himself, perhaps with a pacifier or his thumb. Try softly rubbing his back and humming gently to him – without picking him up. Babies can often learn to comfort themselves, they just need a little comforting from you so they can be ready to sleep through the night. The goal is to let your baby find his own rhythm for falling asleep so he can put himself to sleep.

This is a perfect time to **begin to establish bedtime rituals**: warm bath, a book or two, a favorite song, some rocking and then – to bed. Some parents find that setting a bedtime and then sticking to it really helps. A quiet, consistent and predictable evening routine is something your baby can look forward to and count on.

Here are a couple of books you might find helpful; see if your library has copies of these:

Healthy Sleep Habits, Happy Child, by Marc Weissbluth, M. D., Fawcett Books, N.Y., 1987, 1999.

Sleeping Through the Night, *How Infants, Toddlers and their Parents Can Get a Good Night's Sleep*, Jodi A. Mindell. Ph. D., Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 1997.



PLAYTIME

Babies like to play! With their feet and hands, what discoveries they make everyday! Now your baby can begin to reach and hold objects. Hold a rattle in front of her, watch her reach and try to grasp it. She'll like to play with her feet, rock back and forth, and kick. She may even roll over!

Everyday you'll be surprised at what your baby learns. When on his tummy he'll try to push himself up and it might make him mad, but **some tummy time everyday** is important. You can prop up a board book with bright pictures in front of him or put one on the side of his crib. **Chicka, Chicka, ABC** by Bill Martin, Jr. is a good one as are books by Brian Barton and Lois Ehlert. Look for bright, clear, contrasting illustrations. Or, you can make some yourself with colored markers or crayons.

This is a time when **babies like to stare at things a lot**. They are really working on trying to make sense of what they see. This is a good time to read and sing to your baby– you'll have a captive audience before she begins to roll over and crawl. Bright simple books are best and babies like pictures of real things, a banana, for example, that they also see on the kitchen counter and at the grocery store. You can make a book of familiar things with photos you take yourself: of family members, the dog or cat, a ball, your car, fruits and vegetables, a doll or teddy bear, a truck; find an inexpensive photo book or use clear contact paper to protect the pages.

SAFETY

You'll want to make sure that playtime with your baby is as safe as possible. Never leave your baby on your bed alone or on the sofa. You'll be surprised how strong she is; she can give a big push with her legs and scoot off onto the floor when you are least expecting it! And once babies learn to grasp they can pull things over onto themselves.

This is an excellent time to baby-proof your home. Pick up any little things that might be on the floor, you'll be amazed at what a baby can get to her mouth; everything needs to be tasted, even insects and pieces of fuzzy carpet! Watch for tiny pins or paperclips. As your baby's vision develops she can spot the tiniest button and that will be the most tempting treat. **Baby-proofing** needs to be a regular part of your housekeeping routine, especially if there are other people coming and going in your house. Check things out by crawling around on your hands and knees!

Put caps on the electrical outlets and make sure there are no cords dangling from window blinds.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

After a spell of the "baby blues" some mothers still feel "down" for a while especially if they are alone much of the day. It often helps to try to get outside for a walk everyday or meet other parents to talk and socialize. We have a

WELCOME BABY! **play group for first time parents** that meets every Tuesday afternoon. Give us a call if you are interested, **360-419-3324**, or just drop in. Dads and grandparents are always welcome, too! And if you've had **twins**, we do have "Parents of Twins" support

BOOKS FOR BABY

This is a nice time to read nursery rhymes and learn new ones. Look for books with bright, bold pictures and verses that repeat and rhyme.

Animal Crackers, Jane Dyer, Little Brown and Company, 1996, 2002

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? Bill Martin, Jr., Holt, 1984

Chicka, Chicka, ABC, Bill Martin, Jr. & John Archambault, Little Simon, 1993

Feathers for Lunch, Lois Ehlert, Harcourt, 1990

Lullaby Moons and a Silver Spoon, *A book of Bedtime Songs and Rhymes*, Brooke Dyer, Little Brown and Company, 2003

Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What do You Hear? Bill Martin, Jr., Holt, 1991



Here's a little song you can sing while changing diapers, or anytime for that matter.

Where, oh, where are baby's fingers?
Where, oh, where are baby's toes?
Where is baby's belly button?
Round and round it goes.

Where, oh, where are baby's ears?
Where, oh, where are baby's toes?
Where is baby's belly button?
Round and round it goes.



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For first-time parents, we have a **Mother-Baby Play Time** (Dads are welcome, too!) every Tuesday afternoon from 2:00 – 4:00. This drop-in group meets in the Family Birth Center Waiting Room, Skagit Valley Hospital in Mount Vernon. Please call for more information, **360-419-3324**.

WELCOME BABY! is a parent support and education program available to families of **all** children, birth to age, three in Skagit County. WELCOME BABY! is sponsored by Skagit County Public Health, Skagit Valley Hospital, Island Hospital, Kiwanis, Rotary, Friends of Welcome Baby & Baby Talk and United Way of Skagit County.

Best wishes from Friends of Welcome Baby, watch for another newsletter when your baby is 5months old.