

Your growing baby: what you need to know

As babies grow and develop their needs change. Our Life Stage Tool gives you all the information you need to help you take good care of your baby, every step of the way.



EARLY PREGNANCY

1

Stop drinking alcohol after a missed period.

- a. The first day you miss your period, you will be about two weeks pregnant. That's the time that the cells that will become your baby are just starting to become different organs of the body. Your baby's brain and nervous system are most likely to be affected by alcohol at that time. So stop all alcohol, and don't drink again until after your baby has stopped breastfeeding.
- b. Do you feel that you are powerless over alcohol? Speak your midwife or doctor about getting the necessary support to beat this addiction.

What's your baby up to? During the first few weeks of pregnancy, the fertilised egg starts to divide into different types of cells, which will develop into different organs. Every cell has the genetic material (DNA) from both parents.

2

Confirm your pregnancy at the clinic.

- a. Go as soon as you know or suspect you are pregnant.
- b. Find your nearest hospital, MOU or day clinic and enquire about taking a pregnancy test. If you have already confirmed your pregnancy using a home testing kit, the nursing sister may do a blood test or an ultrasound scan to see how far along your pregnancy is.
- c. Make sure you take your ID book or other identification papers with you every time you visit the clinic.
- d. If you are on any medication, take the medicines with you to show the nursing sister or doctor. Your medication might have to be changed during your pregnancy so it doesn't harm your baby.
- e. Speak to the clinic sister about signing up to MomConnect so that you can receive regular sms' about your baby's development.

Did you know that at 9 weeks your baby (known as a foetus) is the size of a grape and already has toes?

3

Attend your antenatal appointments.

- a. You will receive a maternity case book as soon as your pregnancy is confirmed. Remember to bring this with you to every appointment.
- b. Before each appointment, write down any questions you may have about your pregnancy so that you can ask your midwife or doctor.
- c. Take food, water and a book or magazine to read with you in case you have to wait before your appointment.
- d. Make sure you know the date for your next appointment before you leave the clinic/ hospital.

Your baby's heart starts beating at 6 weeks and will continue to grow and develop throughout your pregnancy.

Your baby's first brainwaves can be detected from 6 weeks after conception. This doesn't mean that he is able to think consciously; that will only come later in pregnancy, but his brain will continue to develop at a rapid pace throughout your pregnancy.

4

Look after your body, mind and soul.

- a. Your amazing body is growing a baby. All the changes taking place inside of you can be overwhelming and exhausting so it is important that you take good care of yourself. Get lots of rest, exercise as normal and make sure you have a balanced diet and drink plenty of fluids.
- b. As soon as your pregnancy has been confirmed, the midwife or doctor will speak to you about taking vitamins such as folic acid and iron. You can get these vitamins for free from your local Government clinic. If this isn't mentioned during your first visit, ask about receiving free vitamins.
- c. You may experience nausea, referred to as 'morning sickness'. This usually only lasts for the first few weeks and is usually manageable. If you don't feel like you are coping, please go back to your clinic or hospital.
- d. Pregnancy is an emotional time. Spend some time thinking about how you're feeling. Are you excited? Scared? Worried? Relieved? If you would like someone to talk to, contact us (web link to contact page) so we can connect you to a caring person.



LATE PREGNANCY

1

Book your birth.

- a. At the antenatal clinic, your health practitioner will book your birth as this will make it much easier for you once you go into labour. Obviously you won't know exactly when the baby will come unless you are having a scheduled Caesarean section, but the midwives and doctors like to know more-or-less when you will deliver.
- b. If your pregnancy is considered high-risk, you will be referred to a hospital able to care for you during pregnancy and birth.
- c. Make sure you take your maternity case book and your ID book with you when you make your booking.

What's your baby up to? At 20 weeks (half-way), your baby is roughly the size of a banana.

2

Connect with your unborn baby.

- a. Your baby is comforted by the sound of your voice. Touch your tummy and talk or sing to him every day.
- b. The part of your baby's brain that is responsible for language starts developing in the womb, so talk and sing to him.
- c. Pregnancy can be a very 'un-real' experience because you cannot see your baby. By talking, singing or reading to her, you are reminding yourself that she is real!

At about 16 weeks after conception, your baby's ears begin to stand out from the sides of her head and she might be able to hear sounds already.

3

Decide on your birth plan.

- a. Your birth is a very important experience for both you and your baby. It is a good idea to think through what you would like to happen when you are giving birth. Speak to your midwife or doctor about the different birth options available to you.
- b. Do you have a partner, family member or friend who could stay with you during your labour and support you during the birth? You are allowed to have someone with you to give you some much-needed support.
- c. Ask your midwife or doctor when is the best time to come to the hospital or MOU after you have gone into labour. You might be sent home if you come in too early.

From week 35 your baby begins to gain weight very quickly as he prepares to enter the world. His lungs are already well-developed and he is already learning to breathe.

4

Rest and prepare for the baby's arrival.

- a. Get as much sleep as you can before the baby arrives. This is often difficult because you may be uncomfortable. Even if you can't sleep, put your feet up and rest!
- b. Make sure you have some essential items for your baby. A new baby doesn't need much. Items may include: Vests, baby grows, nappies and simple toiletries.
- c. Pack your hospital bag. Ask your midwife or doctor what you need to bring for you and baby during your stay at the hospital.

At 40 weeks, your baby is ready to be born. Most babies are born between 38 and 42 weeks.



0 - 6 MONTHS

1

Get breastfeeding support.

- a. Breastfeeding is best for your baby. The first milk your body produces is called colostrum and it is the perfect first milk for your baby.
- b. If possible, try to get your baby to latch as soon as she is born or within the first hour after birth. If you have had a vaginal delivery without an epidural, your baby should need very little coaching to find your nipple and enjoy her first feed. Place your baby on your chest with her head between your breasts and watch as she moves her head to reach your nipple.
- c. Ask to see the hospital or MoU's lactation consultant so she can show you comfortable feeding positions and how to help your baby latch correctly. This will prevent you from damaging your nipples in the early weeks.
- d. Virtually all babies do best on breast milk for the first six months of life. They need no other food. If you are HIV positive, it is very important that you only breastfeed your baby until they are at least six months old.

What's your baby up to? Your baby is adjusting to life outside of the womb. He is comforted by the sound of your voice as he remembers hearing it in the womb. You will notice from week 1 that when he hears your voice, he tilts his head in your direction to find you.

2

Register your baby's birth.

- a. When your baby is born you will receive a maternity certificate from the hospital. You will need this document to register your baby's birth at Home Affairs (unless the hospital or MOU provides a birth registration service).
- b. You need to register your baby's birth within 30 days from his birth date. Once the birth has been registered, the government will issue your child a birth certificate. This is a very important document and must be kept in a safe place.
- c. You need a birth certificate in order to access the child support grant, if you qualify for this.
- d. To apply for the child support grant, go to your local SASSA branch with your ID book and your child's birth certificate.

Between 4 and 8 weeks, your baby will begin to smile at you when you smile and talk to him. These smiles are because he is happy to see you and not because he has a trapped wind, so enjoy them and encourage him to smile regularly.

3

Follow the immunization schedule.

- a. The South African government immunisation schedule is outlined in your baby's Road to Health card.
- b. Your child will receive her first immunisation soon after birth and will require three more sets of immunisations before she is 6 months old.
- c. Immunisations are due when your baby is 6, 10 and 14 weeks old and can be given by a nursing sister at your local clinic. Your baby will have her fourth set of immunisations at 9 months and her 5th set at 18 months. The nursing sister will weigh and measure your baby at each visit to ensure she is growing well. Immunisations and well-baby check-ups at government clinics are free of charge.
- d. It is important to take your baby's Road to Health clinic card with to each visit so that the nursing sister can chart your baby's growth.

You will notice that your baby is able to start supporting her own head from about 8 weeks of age. Place your baby on a blanket on her tummy with her arms in front of her for a few minutes every morning and afternoon. This will encourage her to lift her head and strengthen her upper body and neck. Don't worry if she doesn't like this at first. Play with her on the floor and she will soon learn that time on her tummy can be fun.

4

Embrace your baby.

- a. You are all your baby needs to feel loved and safe. Your baby is little for such a short period of time so try to enjoy this time in his life, even though it can be exhausting and hard work. Remember, you cannot spoil a young baby with too much love and affection so go to him when he needs you and enjoy all the cuddles and baby kisses.
- b. Your baby is happiest when he is close to you so carry him often. Make use of a towel, a strong piece of fabric or a baby carrier to help you hold or wear your baby whilst leaving your arms and hands free. Wearing your baby like this encourages him to engage with his world with the secure knowledge that you are right there to keep him safe.
- c. Play with your baby. Hold him close to your face so he can see you and talk, sing or tickle him. When your eyes connect with his, you are encouraging a brain process called 'serve and return'. This is a vital process that helps shape the way his brain will work for the rest of his life.

At about 3 months old, you will notice that your baby is able to follow moving objects and people with his eyes. This is called 'tracking' and is a very important skill as it helps with hand-eye coordination. Your baby will also start recognising you in a room full of people and you will see his face light up when he sees you walk into the room.



6 - 12 MONTHS

1

Talk to your baby.

- a. The part of your baby's brain that is responsible for language, peaks between 6 and 9 months of age. Make sure you talk to him through-out the day so that he is exposed to a variety of words and sounds.
- b. If there is more than one language spoken in your home, you might want to expose baby to both languages regularly. When your baby starts to talk, you will be amazed by how easily he communicates in both languages.
- c. Try to use proper words when talking to your baby. Even though he will only start talking later, he is learning your language by listening to the words you say. Make sure you make eye-contact with him and keep your voice energetic and cheerful so that your baby learns to enjoy these conversations with you.

What's your baby up to? Your baby may start saying his first words at around 6 months of age. Most babies start with hard sounds, such as "baba" or "dada" because they are easier to say.

2

Introduce solid food.

- a. Solid food should be introduced to your baby at around 6 months of age. You will know your baby is ready for solid food when she is able to sit with little or no support, when she loses the tongue-thrust reflex which will allow her to swallow easily, and when she starts showing interest in what you are eating.
- b. Sweet potato, butternut and avocado are good first foods. You do not have to start with baby cereals as fresh vegetables have far more nutrients in them. Introduce solid food slowly so that your baby's tummy can adjust to all the new flavours and textures. Do not add any salt or sugar to your baby's food.
- c. Never leave your baby alone with food as this can be dangerous. Enjoy meals with your baby and have a clean cloth ready because meal times will be messy. Watch your baby for signs that she is full. Never force your baby to eat more than she wants to as this might hurt her tummy and make her gain too much weight.

Your baby is developing different ways of holding and grabbing objects. This is helpful when it comes to feeding her solid foods. You may notice her using his thumb and index finger to pick up finger foods. This is called the pincer grip and is a sign that baby is ready to start feeding herself.

3

Play with your baby.

- a. From about 6 months old, your baby will begin to understand the concept of play and she will enjoy participating in a number of fun activities with you. Playing with your baby is about more than having fun. It's an opportunity for your baby to develop her fine and gross motor skills, her five senses and her ability to read and respond to people.
- b. Play games such as Peekaboo with your baby and watch her giggle as you pull your hands away from your eyes. Simple games that are played in your lap or on the floor with your baby will become your baby's favourite.
- c. Give your baby simple toys to help him practice hand-eye coordination and stimulate his imagination. A wooden spoon and a pot or dried beans in a closed plastic bottle will provide plenty of fun.

Most babies begin crawling at around 9 months of age. Your baby will love his new ability to move around so make sure you keep him safe by keeping doors closed and removing and dangerous items from his reach.

4

Recognise your baby's emotional development.

- a. At around 6 or 7 months, your baby begins to realise that he is his own little person. Before this, he believed that you and he were one person. The realisation that he is separate from you can cause "separation anxiety". Your baby may cry when you leave the room because he doesn't like the idea of being away from you. When you need to leave your baby, always remember to say goodbye and tell him you will come back. The more you do this, the more you will reassure him that you always return.
- b. Your baby will display a wider range of emotions in the second half of his first year. Allow him to express these emotions in a safe environment and if he shows signs of frustration or distress, reassure him that you are there.
- c. Inspire your baby's imagination by reading to him, singing and dancing with him or by playing with him. Take him outdoors and point out the different objects you see.

Your baby now knows her name and will look at you when you call her.



12 - 24
MONTHS

1

Stimulate your baby's imagination.

- a. In the second year, your baby will start to show signs of her active imagination. Encourage her to develop her imagination by playing make-believe games with her.
- b. When you are out with your baby, point out items such as a birds' nest or an old tyre and make up stories using those objects.
- c. Talk to your baby about colours, numbers and shapes. Think of interesting ways to introduce these concepts to your baby through play.

What's your baby up to? Your baby is learning to create two word sentences such as "Mommy up" or "my ball". In the second year, your baby's favourite word will probably be "no".

2

Develop your baby's physical strength.

- a. Encourage your baby to increase her physical abilities through lots of practice with your baby in a safe environment.
- b. Take your baby outside and encourage her to jump or climb over objects. If you have a park nearby, let her experience the swings and the slide with your support and guidance.
- c. Show her what is safe and what isn't but try not to scare her by over-reacting if she attempts an activity she isn't ready for.

In the middle of your baby's second year, she will be willing to learn physical skills like throwing and kicking a ball or riding a push bike. Give her plenty of opportunity to practice these skills. You will be amazed at how quickly she masters them.

3

Care for your baby's teeth.

- a. Your baby will get his first teeth before he is one year old and by the end of his second year, he will have a mouth full of teeth. It is important to teach your baby to take good care of his teeth so that they don't get cavities. Remember that diet is the most important part of keeping your baby's teeth healthy so avoid food with too much sugar.
- b. As soon as your baby has teeth, you should start brushing them. Buy a small, soft-bristle tooth brush that is suitable for babies. You can start brushing with water and then when your baby is used to the concept, introduce toothpaste made for young children.
- c. Create a song to sing with baby so that the experience is fun. Brush your baby's teeth very gently and then give him the tooth brush so that he can try himself. Don't worry if he just bites the tooth brush – as long as he is participating with you, you are helping him learn healthy habits.

Towards the end of baby's second year, he might be able to sing or hum along to simple songs if he has heard them many times before. Sing with him often and use actions to help him understand and remember the words.

4

Nurture independence in your baby.

- a. Your baby will still love being close to you, but she may want to start exploring her world on her own. This is a good sign of a healthy, happy baby so you should encourage her to be independent in a safe environment.
- b. Let her help you with simple chores such as wiping spills on the floor or picking weeds in the garden. Praise her when she helps you so that she feels good about her behaviour.
- c. Give your baby simple choices where she can start showing her own personality. Offer her two t-shirts to wear and let her pick the one she wants, or let her choose whether she wants to eat an apple or an orange.

Before she turns two, your baby will start to want to dress herself. She might even be able to put on her own shoes, although she probably won't know which shoe belongs on which foot. Her vocabulary will increase to about 75 words but it is likely that only her family will understand what she is saying.