



Step by Step

Is my child growing well and on schedule? Is he too slow?
BONA answers your questions on developmental milestones.

Developmental milestones are the different skills and abilities your baby achieves at the expected age. Doctor Melodie de Jager, developmental spokesperson for Pampers South Africa and founder of Baby Gym, says that as parents we often think that if we wait, our child will "grow out of it".

However, if a child doesn't grow out of it, the best time to fix the problem (by 18 months) may long have passed. Melodie helps you find out when and how to give your baby's development a boost.

1 HEAD CONTROL: Babies develop from head to toe, so this is the first movement a baby masters and it is necessary for achieving other movement skills such as sitting, crawling and walking. To develop head control, babies are generally motivated to turn their heads in an attempt to locate a sound or look around.

- **When to worry:** If at four months your baby is still unable to turn their head, visit a specialist.
- **What you can do:** Place your baby's chest on a rolled-up towel to open the airways, encourage head control and

get used to tummy time. Your baby might not like to be on their tummy, but it is a must. You can make this enjoyable by placing a small mirror in front of them while you gently touch them.

Contrary to popular belief, only 60% of babies can walk by their first birthday

2 ROLLING: This is the first movement that allows your baby to be mobile.

- **When to worry:** If your baby can't roll after six months.
- **What you can do:** Encourage rolling by placing your baby on a rug on their back and allowing them to explore freely. After a while, turn your baby over onto their tummy. Place a colourful object where your baby can see it but cannot touch it. Seeing the object will encourage your baby to move towards it.

3 GRASPING: Between their second and fourth months, babies discover their hands and seem to be fascinated by them as they rotate them close to their eyes. At four months, your baby can bring their half-open hands together in the direction of an object to hold it. At about eight months, your baby can grasp an object accurately, hold it firmly and even pass it from one hand to the other.

- **When to worry:** At 11 months.
- **What you can do:** Begin with a simple hand massage. Use your thumb to softly unfold the hand from the wrist to the tip of each finger individually. Rub the tips of the fingers. Tease the hands with a solid object that is small enough to fit in the palm of the hand, but too big to fit in the mouth. The handle of a rattle or a teething ring works well. When the hand closes around it, gently pull it out of the hand.

4 SITTING: By eight months, your baby should be able to sit without any support. Initially, a baby sits by supporting themselves with both hands in front of them.

- **When to worry:** If, by nine months, they still can't.

- **What you can do:** Place your baby on their back on your lap. Place both your hands behind their shoulders and support the head from dropping back. Slowly raise your baby towards you into a sitting position. Slowly release the pressure and allow them to relax back against your lap. Repeat this a few times until your baby can hold themselves up without using their hands for balance.

5 CRAWLING: As soon as a baby can lie on their tummy and support themselves on their hands, they are ready to crawl.

- **When to worry:** If your baby still can't crawl at 11 months.
- **What you can do:** Fold a cloth into a rectangle. Place the rectangle on the floor and place your baby on their tummy on the cloth with its ends sticking out on both sides. Pull the ends upwards and your baby's body will rise into an all-fours position. Gently rock them forward and backward. Do this daily, until your baby starts moving in this position on their own.

6 STANDING: As soon as the thrill of crawling starts to decrease, your baby will have the strength to pull themselves up into a standing position.

- **When to worry:** At 14 months.
- **What you can do:** Let your baby hold your fingers and allow them to stand on your lap and later to jump on your lap.

7 WALKING: Contrary to popular belief, only 60% of babies can walk by their first birthday. Some start walking at nine months and others at 16 months.

- **When to worry:** If your baby isn't walking by 18 months.
- **What you can do:** Use push toys, strollers and boxes to help baby practice walking.

DID YOU KNOW? Placing your baby in a walking ring prevents them from naturally pulling themselves up when they are ready to do so. Instead they hang in the ring, which develops poor posture, low muscle tone, and prevents your baby from crawling. In addition, most learning problems are due to babies not crawling.

8 TALKING: Your baby will start babbling at eight months and should say words like mama, and dada at 12 months. They should be able to say 10 words clearly at about 18 months.

- **When to worry:** When your baby fails to say any word between the age of 18 and 20 months.
- **What you can do:** Talk to them from the moment they are born. Tell them what you are doing, like "I am washing your arms" and "I am washing your tummy". Sing songs and tell them stories. Babies love hearing a human voice more than a voice on TV. See an expert if this doesn't work.

- Baby Gym specialises in movement and play to ensure the optimal development of your baby's brain and limbs. Contact them on: 011 888 5434 or 082 301 5860. [e]