

YOUR 9 MONTH OLD

What an exciting time this is for parents as you watch your infant transform into a curious toddler who loves to explore the world and who is beginning to demonstrate a little independence. The changes seem to have happened overnight – and good news. There are more exciting new developments ahead!

FEEDING

Your baby has probably been enjoying solid foods now for several months. Meals should continue to be a fun time for both of you, so we hope you will enjoy these times together. Don't worry about messes, and please don't force your baby to eat when he isn't hungry. Your baby is learning how to recognize when he is hungry and when he does not need to eat, so please respect his choices.

Now that your baby is 9 months old, solid foods become a more important part of her nutrition. She now needs more protein and more calories than she can obtain from milk. So you can give her solid food first and her milk can come later. Most babies will continue to drink about 24 – 30 ounces of milk a day until their first birthdays – and the milk should continue to be breast milk or formula. Please do not give your baby regular cow's milk until after her first birthday.

Most babies are eating three meals a day plus several snacks by the time they are one year of age. You can gradually increase the amount of food you offer during the day and your baby will decide whether or not he is hungry or wants the food.

+ Food you offer should be healthy. Please avoid unhealthy snacks like cookies, sugary cereals, and chips. Some ideas of healthy snacks are: small pieces of soft fruit, avocado or tofu; plain yogurt, soft cheese, scrambled eggs / quiche

+Babies can easily choke. Please make sure your baby is sitting down when eating.

Don't give your baby small, hard object to eat – like popcorn, peanuts, small candies, raw carrots, or uncut grapes. (Grapes can become stuck over the baby's windpipe and should be cut into small pieces before being offered to your baby. Hotdogs or sausages sliced in circles are also dangerous and should be cut into smaller pieces.)

+Babies don't need juice. Juice has too much sugar. Plain fruit is a better option for your baby.

You may want to introduce your baby to a cup at this time. One way to help your baby learn to use a cup is to let her practice while she is in the bathtub. Then, if she spills the water from the cup, she will not be making a mess. During the next few months, encourage your baby to use her cup for water and offer her water several times during the day.

Remember that feeding time is still an opportunity for your baby to learn. He is learning new tastes and textures of food. He is learning to feed himself. He is learning to pick up objects – and drop them. (Babies at this age are just learning that they can let go of objects, so they love to drop things and watch you pick them up. They are not trying to make you angry! If you are tired of the game, just take the object away from your baby and distract him with another activity.) Because he is learning so much, meal times may be messy.

(You may want to place a sheet of plastic underneath the table or high chair to help with clean up.)

SLEEPING

Infants often change sleep patterns at 8 – 9 months. Even those infants who were sleeping all night start waking up several times a night at this age. There are several reasons for this:

- + Babies now have a sense of object permanency. That means your baby knows you exist even when she cannot see you. So when she wakes up at night, she knows you are there somewhere and can call out to you.
- + Babies can use their language to attract you – they often can say, “da da da” by this age
- + Babies are learning so many new things and whenever children are going through a rapid phase of development, they may have sleep difficulties. Babies at 9 months are often pulling themselves to stand, and, if sleeping in a crib, may not be able to put themselves back down to return to sleep.

To help your baby through this time, you probably don’t want to start any new unnecessary habits. Don’t misinterpret your baby’s fussing. He is probably not hungry and does not need to nurse or have a bottle. Just speak softly to him and reassure him that you are there – but remind him that it is time to go to sleep and lay him back down.

DEVELOPMENT

Muscles

Many babies are beginning to pull themselves to stand and may be starting to cruise while holding on to furniture. All babies should be able to sit alone by this age, and all babies should be able to move from place to place. Some babies move by crawling, but some babies move by rolling over and over or scooting on their bottoms. If your baby cannot sit all by himself or is not moving from one place to another, please check with your pediatrician.

Your baby may look bowlegged or may walk with her feet turned out. Her feet will probably look quite flat. All these are normal at this age and your baby will “outgrow” these changes. If you have questions, please ask your pediatrician.

Shoes for babies are mainly to protect his feet and do not help your baby learn to walk. Shoes should be very soft and flexible and wide enough to allow your baby’s toes lots of room. You do not need to spend extra money to buy “high backed” shoes or shoes with special arches. When you are at home, it is actually better for your baby’s development to allow him to walk bare-footed if it is safe to do that.

Language

Your baby may be saying “dada” or “mama” but may not know what those words mean yet. When you respond to your baby’s words, she will quickly learn what they mean! You can help your baby learn words by pointing to objects and naming them. Have a time every day when you read to your baby. Point to pictures in books and talk to your baby about them. “See the rabbit. The rabbit has long ears.”

Babies at this age are beginning to understand what you say, but their vocal cords are not fully developed to allow them to say words. However, babies can communicate with you in many ways – and sign language offers your baby the opportunity to show you what he wants without the need for talking. If you use the same sign each time you say a word, your baby may begin to connect the sign with the word. Then he can use it to communicate his needs, such as “hungry”, “thirsty”, or “more”.

PARENTING - DISCIPLINE

The word “discipline” often has negative connotations – it causes parents to think of bad experiences they had as children or they associate the word with severe punishment. However, the word “discipline” comes from a Greek word that means “to teach or instruct.” All parents realize that one of the most important roles of parents is to teach their children, but many are surprised to realize that teaching will begin at such an early age.

Several developmental changes are occurring now that make it the right time to start teaching your baby what is correct behavior. Your baby is beginning to develop her own identity. She is realizing that she can become independent by crawling or moving away from you. She learns by exploring her environment, so she is going to check out every part of your home. She is also starting to understand what you say – and can begin to understand the concept of “no” or “stop”. (You may already have noticed this if you have told her not to touch something and saw that she looked at you a little differently.)

Parents are often concerned about using the word “no”. They think if they use the word too often, it will be one of the first words children say back to them. They also worry that they will be stifling or inhibiting their child’s creativity or development. We understand these concerns, but want to reassure you that it is very important for your child to hear you say “no”.

+ Having this concept of “no” actually helps his development

During the second year of life your child will need to develop more independence as he realizes that he is a different person from you. The best way he can show you that he thinks differently and wants to act differently from you is for him to say “no”.

+Hearing the word “no” helps her learn what behavior is acceptable and what behaviors she needs to stop

You may choose another word(s) such as “stop” or “don’t touch”, but the concept of “no” is implied. There is no way to tell your toddler to stop touching something dangerous without have the concept of no.

+Hearing the word “no” actually enhances your child’s ability to problem solve and be creative.

If your child is told “Don't touch the hot stove”, then your child will start thinking – “If I can’t touch the stove, what else can I do for fun?” This allows your child to begin to think creatively and problem solve.

+Hearing the word “no” will help keep your child safe.

Most parents find that they use the word “no” at this age mainly to protect their children from danger.

+Hearing the word “no” will help your child recognize your leadership as parent.

Your child needs to respect you as the teacher and leader in your home. Then, later on, he will be able to respect his teacher at school and his boss at work.

You might be wondering – “how do I teach my child such a difficult concept as this?” The following “Ds” will help you teach your 9 month old the concept of “no”:

Determine the rules

Although this is the first thing for you to do – it is also the most difficult. Everything your child does will be new, cute, and exciting, and you will be tempted to laugh and enjoy the new activity, even if it is something as simple as touching the remote control on the television. However, you will need to think ahead – “Will I think this is enjoyable if she does it repeatedly over the next few weeks?” “Will this activity still be funny and cute, or will it become annoying?” If you decide that the behavior might become annoying, you may decide that this activity will be discouraged by using the word “no”. (You might also decide to change your child’s environment and move the remote control.)

Demeanor should be changed

If you are going to use the word “no”, you must change your facial expression – your demeanor. Infants and young children pay more attention to your face and tone of voice than they do to the words you say. So, if you are laughing at a new activity your little one is doing, but you think you should be discouraging it, turn your face away from your infant. Finish laughing before attempting to say “no”. Then turn back to your child with a serious face and a lowered voice to say “No, don’t touch”. Mothers especially need to lower their voices so that your children will recognize that what you are saying is important.

Displace your infant

Once you have told your infant “no”, move your child away from the activity or object.

Distraction

As you move your child to a different place, distract him with something else that he can play with – a book or toy. You should expect that he will crawl back to the desired, forbidden object. So the next “D” is especially important.

Diligence (because ‘consistency’ did not start with a “D”)

Children learn when the rules are consistent. Consistency allows your child to predict consequences of actions, adjust her behavior, and ultimately develop self-control. But being consistent is very difficult for parents! Your child will learn that you mean what you say when you are consistent in your response. Most parents have experienced this situation. The infant is heading toward a forbidden object, reaches out to touch it, but first looks back to the parent to see what might happen. The infant is clearly incorporating the concept of “no”, but while still learning, wants to make sure that the parent’s response will be consistent. So be Diligent / consistent in your responses.

SAFETY

By this time, you should have made changes to your home to protect your baby from accidents and injuries. Your child will be depending upon you to protect him from dangerous situations. He cannot see the possible dangers – so it is up to you to change your home to make it safer. Please see the 6 month old handout on “Prescriptions for Parents” for specific ideas on how to “baby proof” your home.

As you make your home safer for your baby, you may realize that you are also helping prepare your home for an earthquake or other emergency. Take this time to evaluate your emergency preparations.

- +Water heater bolted?
- +Foundation bolted?
- +Fire extinguisher available?
- +Bottled water available - 1 gallon per person per day for at least 3 – 5 days
- +Canned and dry food available?
- +Battery operated radio available?
- +Flashlight with batteries?
- +First aid kit?
- +Crescent wrench to turn off gas / water?
- +Blankets, warm clothes?
- +Large plastic bags for waste?
- +Large heavy furniture bolted to wall? (Children have climbed up bookcases and TV cupboards, pulling them down upon themselves causing serious injuries)

You can go to www.ready.gov for much more information on emergency preparedness.

PARENTING

The focus of parenting begins to shift now from mainly meeting your child’s physical needs like food, clothing, and shelter to also meeting your child’s emotional and developmental needs. This transition is an important, yet difficult, one for parents to make. If you are having difficulty in your parenting role, please talk with your pediatrician.

Used with permission: Jane E. Anderson, M.D. “Prescriptions for Parents”