

## ***YOUR 4 MONTH OLD***

Your baby has been making such developmental strides over the past two months, and hopefully you have been enjoying the new little person in your life. We hope these guidelines will help you know what to expect over the next two months.

### ***FEEDING***

Breast milk or formula has all the nutrition that your baby needs, and you should continue feeding your baby milk for the next 2 months. He does not need any additional food until he is 6 months old. Babies of this age still have an immature intestinal system and cannot properly control their muscles for chewing and swallowing. So they are still not ready for solids. If your baby is mainly breastfed, remember to continue to take your prenatal vitamins and give your baby 400 units of vitamin D each day.

### ***SLEEPING***

By 4 months of age, many babies are capable of sleeping for at least 6 – 8 hours at night. Although parenting experts differ on how to help infants sleep at night – and even whether breastfed infants should sleep this long at night – most parents need to be able to sleep a little at night so they can be better parents during the daytime.

Everyone wakes up during the night – but we have learned to settle ourselves and go back to sleep. If you would like your infant to sleep a little longer, consider allowing her to squirm a little before you respond. She may put herself back to sleep without your intervention.

If you would like additional information on helping your infant sleep longer, see the Two Month Old handout on Prescriptions for Parents.

### ***TEETHING***

Teeth may appear at any time during your child's first year of life, and it is difficult to predict exactly when a tooth will erupt (break through the gum) unless you can actually see or feel the tooth. Salivary glands (that make saliva) begin working at about 2 - 3 months of age, so you have probably noticed that your baby is drooling constantly. Babies also start putting their hands in their mouths at this age. Parents often think that drooling and hands in mouth behavior must mean that their baby is teething, but these are just normal behaviors for four month old infants.

Usually the first two teeth to appear are the bottom front teeth – the lower central incisors. The next teeth to come in are the upper incisors. But the eruption of teeth can be very different from one infant to another. The first tooth usually appears sometime between 4 months and 12 months of age, but some infants will have their first tooth appear before four months of age. (Only 1% of infants will not have one tooth by their first birthday.)

Although infants have obviously been teething for thousands of years, there is not much research that helps us know about teething. There is not one symptom that can tell us a baby is teething, and there is nothing that a baby does today that predicts a tooth is coming

tomorrow. Just before a tooth erupts, the infant may be slightly more fussy than usual (especially at night), may drool a little more, and have less of an appetite for solid foods. But some infants do not seem to be affected at all by teething and have no changes in their behavior. Teething does not cause diarrhea or fever, although in research studies the temperature may increase slightly the day before the tooth erupts. However, teething does not cause babies to have a true fever. If your baby appears sick or has rectal temperature above 38 C (100.4 F), teething is not to blame, so please call your physician.

There are many ideas on how to help infants with the apparent pain of teething. You can allow him to suck on a cold object, like a chilled wash cloth (and when he is older on a frozen banana or bagel) or a cold teething ring. There are homeopathic teething medicines (like Hylands) that are generally safe for infants – but always check with your doctor first. If needed, you can use acetaminophen, again as directed by your doctor. Please do not use topical “toothache” medications such as Orajel or Numzit as they may cause serious reactions in some babies.

### ***DEVELOPMENT***

Babies at this age are so much fun. They enjoy cooing, laughing, seeing people and talking to them. In fact, they are so interested in the world around them that they would rather look at something interesting rather than eat. (If your baby is distracted when eating, try feeding her in a darkened room or using a small blanket to gently cover her face to encourage her to focus on eating.)

#### *Language*

Continue to spend time talking with your baby, laughing with her and playing “word games” with her. Try making a funny face or noise and then wait to see if your baby will copy you. When your baby makes a sound, copy him. Read stories to your baby and show him picture books. You may want to try using sign language with your baby to help her communicate in a different way. Beginning at 6 – 8 months of age, try using a hand signal every time you use a word like “hungry” or “more”. Your baby may be able to use sign language to let you know her needs before she can actually talk to you. The book “Baby Signs” has many ideas for sign language.

#### *Muscles*

Your baby should be enjoying sitting and standing now with your support. His body should feel strong when you are holding him – and you will need to hold him carefully so he doesn’t twist out of your grasp.

#### *Vision*

Your baby’s eyes should always be tracking and moving together and you should no longer see your baby’s eyes cross. If you do, or if you have any concerns about your baby’s vision or hearing, please call your pediatrician.

#### *Stranger anxiety*

Although the developmental text books state that stranger anxiety begins at 9 months, it is not unusual to see 4 month old infants who do not like strangers (and even grandparents who they haven’t seen for a while) come too close too quickly. Remind your friends and

relatives that your baby is able to recognize her parents and may be a little cautious around new people. If you see this, ask your guests to take a few moments to allow your baby to see them from a distance before coming too close.

### ***SAFETY and HEALTHY HABITS***

Always place your baby on her back for sleep

Always place your baby in his car seat when traveling by car or taxi. She should still be facing backwards – and you should make sure you are buckled up also.

Never leave your baby alone on a high place. If you have to leave your baby alone, it is better to place him on the floor so he cannot fall.

Don't drink a hot beverage while holding your baby. She may reach out and knock the drink out of your hand, burning both of you

Never shake your baby

Wash your hands before and after changing diapers.

Discourage people from smoking in your home

Protect your baby from sun exposure by using a hat or blanket

Walking is excellent exercise for new parents – so take your baby for a walk.

Small objects can now be dangerous as your baby can put them in his mouth – so keep small objects out of his reach

Crib toys that stretch across the crib or mobiles that hang over the crib need to be removed as your baby begins to learn to sit. You may also need to lower the mattress so your baby cannot fall out.

### ***PARENTING***

Did you have your date with your partner? Making your relationship a priority is one of the best things you can do for your baby.

Are you feeling more comfortable with parenting? If not, please talk with your pediatrician about resources to help you.

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