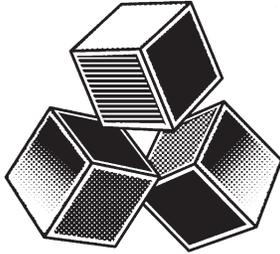


6 Months Old



PARENT EXPRESS

A Guide for You and Your Baby

Dear Parent:

Your baby is a half year old!

Now that your baby has reached the half-year mark, she probably is spending most of her awake time sitting up, playing, babbling, looking, and touching everything. She might be driving you a little crazy because she wants to grab everything she sees. Try to be patient—she is learning about the world.

So far, we have talked about how your baby grows each month. But another person has also grown—you.

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- ▶ Games Babies Play
- ▶ Children Learn By Watching Parents
- ▶ A Question about Crying

What It's Like to Be 6 Months Old

How I Grow

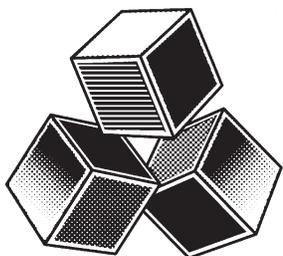
- ▶ I turn and twist in all directions.
- ▶ I roll from my back to my stomach.
- ▶ I sometimes sit up with support for as long as a half hour.
- ▶ I hold onto an object with one hand and then put it in the other hand.
- ▶ I hold one building block, reach for a second one, and look for a third one right away.
- ▶ I grab for an object when it drops.

How I Talk

- ▶ I make sounds such as *f, v, th, s, sh, sz, m,* and *n*.
- ▶ I still babble a lot, but I have more control of sounds.
- ▶ I'm beginning to understand some words by the tone of voice you use.

How I Respond

- ▶ I pick things up, shake them, and listen to the sound they make when I drop them.
- ▶ I play games with people I know.
- ▶ I get upset when I'm around grown-up strangers, but I'm friendly with children I don't know.
- ▶ I coo, hum, or stop crying sometimes when I hear music.
- ▶ I keep busy doing something all the time.



Try reciting or singing while “reading” to him. The more book reading, singing, and rhyming you do, the better. You are helping him form a love for books!

How I Understand

- ▶ I know that I have to use my hands to pick up something.
- ▶ I look at and study things for a long time.
- ▶ I turn objects upside down just to get another view of them.
- ▶ I turn when I hear my name.

How I Feel

- ▶ I haven’t learned to control my feelings yet.
- ▶ I complain and howl when I don’t get my way.
- ▶ I giggle, coo, and squeal with joy when I’m happy.
- ▶ I have strong likes and dislikes about food.

Talk to Your Baby

You don’t have to feel funny talking to your baby just because she can’t talk back yet or because you feel others are watching and judging you. When you answer your baby’s babbling with words or noises that imitate her sounds, you are teaching your baby that sounds are one way we communicate with each other. Communication is an important part of learning.

Babies who are spoken to often also learn to speak more easily. This is because they imitate the sounds and facial expressions of those talking to them. The more they are spoken to, the more practice they get. Notice how your baby watches your face as you talk to her.

The next time you find yourself feeling self-conscious, remember that your baby is learning from you. You are

taking advantage of the window of opportunity for her brain’s ability to develop language. Communicating with others is one of the most important things human beings do. Help your baby with this skill.

Read to Your Baby

Your baby is now more able to use both hands to hold, wave, or bang objects, and he will enjoy doing that with books. He will put books into his mouth and squeeze and drop them. Soft, washable vinyl or cloth books with bright, simple pictures of familiar objects are best.

He will also enjoy the pictures in the books for short periods. He might sit on your lap while you talk to him about the pictures and will enjoy hearing your words and rhymes. Try reciting or singing while “reading” to him. The more book reading, singing, and rhyming you do, the better. You are helping him form a love for books!

Let Your Baby Feed Herself

Your baby probably is eager to learn how to feed herself. She may be messy at first, but she’ll improve with practice.

Encourage her to feed herself. Use finger foods such as crackers and small pieces of bread or toast. Let your 6-month-old help you handle the spoon. Sit behind her so she can hold the spoon or your hands and learn movements to use later when she feeds herself.

Also let your baby try drinking small amounts of iron-fortified formula or

water from a cup or a sippy cup. Offer it each time you feed solid foods. As she becomes skillful at drinking, increase the amount. This is the most natural and comfortable way for baby to gradually wean herself from the bottle.

Your baby will be messy when she is first learning to feed herself. Try not to become overly concerned about neatness at this time. Be prepared with a bib or apron to protect her clothing. A large piece of plastic or newspaper under your baby’s chair will make cleanup easier.

Your baby will learn about food and eating from the social setting during meals. Your attitude and acceptance of nutritious foods will help your baby develop a healthy relationship with food.

Feeding Reminders

Candy, sugar, pre-sweetened cereals, sweet desserts (including baby desserts), fruit-flavored drinks, and soda pop have little food value. Your baby should not eat these sweet foods.

They spoil her appetite for more nourishing foods. They also are harmful to her teeth.

Check the expiration date before purchasing any baby food. Many food products have a date stamped on them. A “Use By” date is the last date recommended for use of the food while at peak quality. After that date, the quality begins to go down. A “Best If Used By” or “Best if Used Before” date is for best product quality. It is not related to safety. Sometimes the term “freshness” is used to mean the same thing.

Basic Recipes for Pureed Baby Foods

These recipes are in one- or two-serving sizes. They may be doubled or tripled if you store food in a freezer that maintains a constant temperature of about 0 degrees Fahrenheit. Be sure to date and label all containers. Keep frozen baby foods no longer than one month.

Fresh Fruit

Do not add sugar.

¾ cup ripe fruit (uncooked peaches, nectarines, pears, apricots, apples)

1 teaspoon unsweetened fruit juice

1 teaspoon lemon-flavored water (1 teaspoon lemon juice to 1 cup water to prevent darkening)

Remove skin and seeds. Puree ingredients in a baby-food mill or blender until smooth. Serve or freeze.

Cooked or Home-Canned Fruits

Use apples, pears, peaches, nectarines, apricots (not dried), or prunes.

½ cup freshly cooked or home-canned fruit, or cooked dried prunes (all without sugar)

2 to 4 teaspoons unsweetened fruit juice, water, or formula

Remove skin (except apricot and prune skins) and seeds. Press through sieve, or place ingredients in baby-food mill or blender. Puree until smooth. Serve or freeze.

Hint: Apples such as Jonathans and Winesaps are better for cooking than Delicious varieties.

Vegetables

Do not add salt, sugar, or fat.

½ cup cooked fresh, frozen or canned vegetables without salt (sweet or white potatoes, green beans, peas, carrots, winter squash)

2 to 4 tablespoons cooking liquid, formula, or water

Cook fresh vegetables or use frozen or home-canned vegetables without salt or seasonings, reading ingredients on label to be sure they don't contain them. Press vegetable chunks through a sieve or baby-food mill. Thin with cooking liquid or formula to eating consistency or place cooked vegetable and liquid in blender; puree until smooth. Serve or freeze.

Note: After the vegetables have been fed individually several times, good combinations to try include potatoes and carrots, potatoes and green beans, and carrots and peas.

Take Care of Your Back

Protect yourself from future back problems. When you pick up your baby, don't bend over from the waist. Instead, bend your knees and kneel or squat, keeping your back as straight as possible. Hold onto your baby and straighten up from the squat position. Make your knees, not your back, do the work.

Use the same knee bends or squats, with your back straight, when you want to pick up something from the floor. This helps prevent back strain.

Remember to watch your posture. When standing or sitting, hold your back straight and pull in your stomach. Good posture protects your back from future aches and pains.

Games Babies Play Getting What You Want: Using a Tool Game

Purpose

This game encourages your baby to use objects as tools for getting what he wants.

How to Play

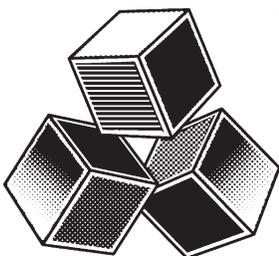
- ▶ Put your baby in a sitting position on the floor. You can sit beside or in front of him.
- ▶ Place a small blanket within his reach.
- ▶ Put a favorite toy on the blanket, but place it out of reach.
- ▶ If your baby does not pull the blanket to get the toy, push the blanket towards him until he can reach the toy.
- ▶ Use action words to describe what he is doing. Say, "See, you got the ball by pulling the blanket." (You can use towels, potholders, or pillows instead of a blanket.)

All babies are different and grow at their own pace. Don't worry if your baby isn't doing exactly the same things as other babies of the same age.

Children Learn By Watching Parents

When raising their children, many parents either do what their own parents did or do just the opposite. What do you copy from your parents? What do you do that is different? Have you thought about why you copy some things and reject others?

Even though your baby is only 6 months old, she is learning from your example. That is why it is so important



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to think about the examples and patterns you set, even at this early age. Once set, patterns of family life are hard to change.

Some patterns that influence your child's life are:

- ▶ How you talk to each other
- ▶ How you work out problems
- ▶ How you show your feelings

You are the most important influence in your child's life.

A Question about Crying

My baby wakes up almost every night and cries until I go to him. Then he wants to play instead of sleep! What can I do?

Some babies have a hard time sleeping at night. They spend the entire day exploring and playing and then at night, even though they are exhausted, they have trouble settling down. They wake up during the night and want to play.

Parents have to gently but firmly let their babies know that it is bedtime, not playtime. When your baby wakes up in the night, go to him. Pick him up, cuddle him, talk to him, change his diaper, and then lay him down to sleep. Tell him firmly that it is bedtime and that he must try to go to sleep.

You also can try spending some quiet time with him before bedtime. Read from a favorite book, play a quiet game together, or hold him closely and sing to him before putting him down for the night.

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