

Communication & Your 1-3 Month Old

This is an exciting time for parents - in this stage, your baby seems to make real progress toward communicating. Your baby will recognize Mommy and Daddy, laugh, squeal and smile spontaneously. Her personality begins to become evident, and she becomes a more active and alert member of your family.

How does my baby communicate?

Crying will continue to be your baby's primary means of communication for many months. Aside from letting you know that she needs something (and perhaps even what she needs by the way she cries), your baby may cry when she is overwhelmed by all of the sights and sounds of the world. Sometimes she may cry for no apparent reason at all. Try not to get too upset when your baby cries and you aren't able to console her.

Your baby will respond to the sound of your voice by becoming quiet, smiling or getting excited and moving her arms and legs. She will begin smiling regularly at her mom and dad during this period. She probably won't smile and act friendly with strangers, but she may warm up to them with coos and body talk - or at least a curious stare.

Babies this age discover that they have the ability to vocalize: soon you'll have a cooing and gurgling machine! Some babies begin to

repeat some vowel sounds, like "ah-ah" or "ooh-ooh," at about two months. Your baby will "talk" to you with a variety of sounds; she'll also smile at you and wait for your response, and respond to your smiles with her own. Her arms and legs will move, and her hands will open up. She may even mimic your facial expressions.

What should I do?

Your baby loves to hear your voice, so talk, babble, sing and coo away during these first few months. Respond enthusiastically to your baby's sounds and smiles. Tell her what she is looking at or doing and what you are doing. Name familiar objects as you touch them or bring them to your baby. Read to your baby; even at this tender age, it will help in the development of her growing brain. By listening to you, your baby will learn the importance of speech before she even understands or repeats any words herself.

Take special advantage of your baby's own "talking" to have a "conversation." If you hear her make a sound, repeat it and wait for her to make another. You are teaching your baby valuable lessons about tone, pacing, and taking turns when talking to someone else. You are also sending her the message that she's important enough to listen to. Don't interrupt or look away when she's talking - show her that you are interested and that she can trust you.

Babies this age seem to respond best to the female voice - the one historically associated with comfort and food. That's why most people will raise the pitch of their voices and exaggerate their speech when talking to a small baby. This is fine - studies have shown that talking "baby talk" doesn't delay the development of speech - but feel free to mix in some regular adult words and tone with the baby talk. It may seem early, but you are really setting the stage for your baby's first word.

Sometimes babies are not in the mood to talk or vocalize - and even babies need their space. If your baby turns away, closes her eyes, or becomes fussy or irritable, let her be. She may need a break from all the stimulation in the world.

There will probably be times when you have met all of your baby's needs, yet she continues to cry. Don't despair - your baby may be overly stimulated, have gastric distress, or may have too much energy and need a good cry. It is common for babies to have a fussy period at the same time every night, generally between early evening and midnight. This can be very upsetting, but the good news is that it's short-lived; most babies outgrow it around three months. There are some things you can try to soothe your baby. Some babies are comforted by motion, such as rocking or being walked back and forth across the room, while others respond to sounds, like soft music or the hum of a vacuum cleaner. It may take some time to find out what best comforts your baby during these stressful periods.

Should I be concerned?

You may want to talk to your doctor if your baby seems to cry for an unusual length of time or if the cries sound odd to you. Your doctor will be able to reassure you or look for a medical reason for your baby's distress. Chances are there is nothing wrong, and knowing this can help you relax and stay calm when your baby is upset.

There are some communication milestones that your baby will probably reach during this period. Babies this age usually:

- Pay attention to new faces and surroundings*
- Respond to loud noises*
- Smile at the sound of a parent's voice*
- Smile at other people by 3 months*
- Babble by 3 or 4 months*

Keep in mind that babies communicate at different rates, just as they mature physically at different rates. There is usually no cause for concern, but talk to your doctor if your baby misses any of these milestones.