

GROWTH AND YOUR 8 TO 12 MONTH OLD

Your baby is changing and growing in many ways, and is crawling, cruising along the furniture, or maybe even walking by 12 months! Along with all this activity comes the ability to self-feed and the start of food preferences. These new developments can affect your baby's growth, especially his or her weight.

How Much Does a Baby This Age Grow?

By the time of the first birthday cake, your baby will probably have almost tripled his or her birth weight and will have grown about 10 inches (25 centimeters). However, physical growth slows down during the second half of the first year.

Your child's doctor will continue to monitor growth during routine visits, usually scheduled at 9 months and 1 year of age.

Should I Be Concerned?

Parents' concerns about growth often center on eating habits. Is your skinny baby a picky eater? Do you worry that your baby isn't getting enough to eat? Chances are that everything is fine. Most babies eat enough to satisfy their hunger, which in most cases is enough to supply them with the energy they need.

Your baby's weight, length, and head circumference have been measured since birth and plotted on a growth chart by your child's doctor. This is where you should start looking if you have questions about how your baby measures up. When you review your child's growth chart with the doctor, make sure to compare your baby's growth with his or her own growth pattern, not with the growth of other babies. As long as your baby's growth is steady, there is probably no reason to worry.

If you do notice slowed growth or a drop in weight, consider these questions:

- **Has your baby been ill?** A couple of days of not eating, especially if combined with vomiting or diarrhea, can lead to weight loss that will be regained when he or she is feeling better.
- **Is your baby on the move?** Crawling, cruising, and walking all burn lots of calories, so weight gain might not be as great with this new mobility.

- **Is your baby just more interested in playing peek-a-boo or dropping the spoon on the floor than eating?** The world is a fascinating place and your baby is learning new things every day. Keep distractions at a minimum during mealtime and pay attention to cues that he or she has eaten enough.
- **Are you introducing the right kinds of foods?** As your baby gets better at eating, you can begin to pay more attention to the texture and variety of foods he or she eats. If your child is not so interested in baby foods anymore, how about introducing soft table foods and finger foods that are safe and fun?

Though growth rate does slow down between 8 and 12 months, your child should continue to follow his or her own growth curve. Talk with your child's doctor if you have any growth-related concerns.

What About the Chubby Baby?

Plump may be the old-fashioned "ideal" of a baby, but a baby who is gaining weight rapidly is a cause for concern. Overweight babies are more likely to be overweight later in life, so consider whether a pattern of overeating and inactivity has begun.

Never withhold feedings from infants, but pay attention to your baby's cues that he or she is full. Also:

- Make sure your baby's calories are coming from nutritious sources - like fruits, vegetables, and fortified cereals - rather than sweets and junk food.
- Make sure your baby isn't drinking high-calorie soft drinks or too much juice.
- Play with your baby to encourage physical activity, making sure he or she has a safe space to move around in.
- Limit the amount of time spent in car seats, strollers, and playpens.

As a parent, one of the best things you can do for your baby is to eat well and be physically active yourself. Your baby has a better chance of growing up fit if good health habits are part of the family's way of life. Not only will you be a good role model for your little one, but you'll have the energy to really enjoy life with your child (and the stamina to chase after him or her).

If you are concerned that your infant is overweight, ask your child's doctor for advice.

What's Next?

Isn't it hard to believe that a year has passed? In 12 short months, your baby has grown from a tiny newborn you could cradle in one arm to a toddler on the move. Between 12 and 24 months, your child will only grow about 4 inches (10.2 centimeters). Though physical growth has slowed, expect big changes in the year to come.

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The information provided in this handout is a free service to the patients of Family Medicine Associates. Please consult with your Primary Care Physician for further explanation and questions.