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9 Months

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GREAT BEGINNINGS

A Series for Parents of Young Children

9 MONTHS

Your Baby Is Learning How to Feed Himself!

Does your baby hold most foods while eating? Or drink from a cup (with a little help)? Or hold and lick the spoon after it is dipped into food? These are the first steps in learning how to eat by himself. You can help him practice by giving him some of the following finger foods:

- Pieces of soft, mild cheese
- Bits of soft toast
- Graham crackers
- Cooked vegetable strips or slices
- Small, tender pieces of meat
- Peeled, soft fruit wedges or slices

Praise your baby while he is feeding himself, even if he is very messy. If the mess really bothers you, spread some newspapers under your baby's chair to catch any food that he drops.

No Seasonings. Although you may find unseasoned foods bland or tasteless, your baby does not. By now your little one can eat most of the things you cook for the family. Just take out your baby's food before you add salt or other seasonings for the rest of the family.

Don't give your baby nuts, seeds, or raw vegetables unless they are mashed or shredded. Avoid all small, hard foods (such as popcorn) that can choke him.

Picky Eaters. Sometimes a baby will reject a certain food on one day and eat it a few days later. Adults do the same thing. Every once in a while you might try giving your child a food he has rejected previously, and you may find that this is the day he likes it. Making foods into "finger foods" also increases the chances that they will get eaten by 9-month-olds. Remember that mealtime should be a pleasant time for you as well as for your baby.

What's It Like to Be 9 Months Old?

How I Grow

- I crawl and turn around, holding onto something with one hand.
- I crawl up stairs, too.
- I sit by myself and turn my body all the way around without losing balance.
- I may be able to stand up and sit down without pulling on furniture.
- I stand for a little while when my hand is held.
- I side-step along furniture.
- I try to build towers with blocks or toys.
- I poke my fingers into holes, or into anything that looks interesting.
- I pick up small things with my first finger and thumb, and larger things with both hands.

How I Talk

- I understand some words, my name, and simple sentences.
- I repeat one or several sounds over and over.

- I like to cough, click my tongue, and make hissing noises.
- I listen to people talking and try to imitate them.

How I Respond

- I like to watch people scribbling on paper.
- I like to perform for people and love it when they applaud.
- I want praise for all my accomplishments.

How I Understand

- I try to figure things out by myself.
- I know that if I partly cover my eyes or look upside down, everything will look different!
- I know which toys are mine and get upset when they are taken away.
- I can remember a game, a person, or a toy from the day before.
- I can tell what kind of mood people are in by looking at them.

How I Feel

- I'm very sensitive. If I see another baby crying, I will cry too.
- I am afraid of a lot of things that didn't bother me before, like taking a bath.
- I am afraid of heights.
- I am very determined and sometimes stubborn —that's all part of my growing up!

Games Babies Play

The Name Game: A Communication Game

Purpose of Game:
- Helps your baby learn that everything has a name.
- Encourages your baby to imitate the sounds you make when you're naming objects.

How to Play:
- Let your baby sit in your lap while you hold a magazine.
- Point out and name at least ten objects pictured in the magazine.
- Point to the object, name it, and say, "See the car. Look at the dog."
- While you are pointing, you can sometimes ask your baby, "What is that?" Wait a few seconds and then say something like "That's a car!"

Note: Your baby will not understand all the words you use. However, he will hear the different tones of your voice. They will help become aware of language.

Drop and Fetch

Does your baby have a new trick that sometimes drives you up a wall? It is called **Drop and Fetch**, and you're the lucky person who gets to do the fetching. It may be tiring for you to keep retrieving the items dropped over the edge of the high chair tray, but your baby just loves it!

Drop and Fetch will give you the clue that your baby has reached a new intellectual landmark. He can now anticipate the landing of an object that disappears from sight. Remember the good old days when "out of sight was gone forever"? Hang in there, parents!!!

Outstanding Teacher

Who's the most important teacher your child will ever have? Her kindergarten teacher? Her first grade reading teacher? Her English or calculus teacher in high school? Her physics professor in college? Her law school advisor? No, all of them put together won't be able to teach her nearly as much as you will. Your parenting job is very important.

Encouraging Curiosity

Researchers who have studied young children report that curiosity is important for success in the early school years. The child who is interested in his environment will observe and learn from it.

How can you help your child develop curiosity about his world? Some research suggests that the first year is very important in laying the foundation

for a lifetime of curiosity. Here are some ideas that you can begin working on right away.

Ears. Let your child listen to music on the radio or on records or tapes. Make a *chime* mobile that will catch the breeze. Talk and sing to your child.

Eyes. Surround your 9-month-old with bright, moving colors in clothing, toys and room decoration. Hang mobiles over the crib or bath, and change them often.

Touch. Give your child many textures—soft, hard, smooth and rough. Make a toy, blanket or ball from scraps of materials, including fabrics such as velvet, corduroy and silk. Touch your child and let your child touch your skin, hair and clothing.

Taste. Let your infant try foods that are really different and delicious.

Smell. Give your child many chances to smell safe things—soap, perfume, food, flowers and feet.

A child who's curious is a child who's learning. Because our world is changing so rapidly, curiosity about the environment will be an important life-long asset.

What Is That Noise?

Have you heard some strange shrieks coming from your baby? She is experimenting with sounds to see what sounds get the attention she wants.

You can help her learn that screeches aren't the best way to communicate if you wait until the shrieking stops and then respond to her needs—unless, of course, the shriek is a real cry for help. You will be able to tell. Also, be sure to reinforce your baby's other forms of communication, such as her talking and babbling.

Starting to Talk

One of these days Baby is going to utter those special first words. What a proud occasion for you and your baby! Let him know how happy you are. Give him a big smile and hug and tell him how pleased you are. When he makes you happy, he'll probably want to try it again.

Keep on Talking

Talking to and explaining things to your baby might seem silly, but research has shown that the more babies are talked to, the more they understand. As they become older, they will learn quickly what you mean just by your verbal description and reasoning. When you talk to your baby, also use actions to help him understand what you mean. KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!

Can't Get Down!

Has your child pulled herself up to standing, acting quite pleased with herself for a minute and then started fussing the next minute? In this situation, she probably doesn't know how to get herself down. You can help by telling her how to get down and helping her do it at the same time. You might have to repeat the action a few times, but she **will** learn to do it all by herself, thanks to your good help.

Safety First

While you're trying hard to foster curiosity, remember that 9-month-olds don't know how to recognize danger. This leaves a heavy responsibility with parents to protect their children, yet allow them the freedom to explore the surroundings.

Here are some important safety ideas:

- Baby proof all cupboards and drawers that can possibly be reached and opened. Remove all sharp objects, breakable things, household products that might poison, plastic bags and foods that might cause choking (such as nuts and popcorn).
- Keep coffee, hot foods, hot pots and pans out of reach.
- Don't use a dangling table cloth that can be pulled onto the floor.
- Keep medicines and household products that might poison in a locked cabinet.

- Be especially careful when guests stay overnight or when someone in your family is sick. Medicines are likely to be out of their usual safe place, and the baby may want to imitate by eating or drinking.
- Keep medicines separate from household products and household products separate from food.
- Avoid giving medicine in the dark. Turn on the light and read the label every time.
- Never leave your baby alone in the bathtub or wading pool. Drowning can occur in only a few inches of water.

Beware of Plastic Wrappers: The clear plastic wrappings of dolls, games and other toys present a real danger. A child can smother in a minute or two inside an airtight plastic wrapping. All such wrappings should be removed and destroyed before the toy is given to the baby.

Choking: Since everything that Baby touches goes into his mouth, sooner or later one of these little treasures may cause choking. When this happens, check to see that baby can still breathe. If so, wait for the object to come up. If not, turn the baby's head down and slap firmly between the shoulder blades. If nothing happens, try again. If Baby still can't breathe when upside down, try to remove the object with your finger.

Chances are, one of these steps will remove the object. If Baby can breathe but keeps choking, rush him to the hospital.

Discipline Doesn't Mean Punishment, It Means Teaching and Guiding

For babies under a year old, discipline is pretty simple. It means teaching limits through loving care and guidance. The key to this teaching is **Reward**. You reward your baby when he does something you approve of, and you distract him when he does something you don't like. For example, when your baby makes sounds and tries to talk, you reward him with a smile. When he does something annoying or touches something you don't want him to, you distract him by offering another toy, or you direct his attention to something else.

Slapping your baby will not teach him to be good. He won't even know why he is being hit. Instead, he will learn that:

- He should be afraid of you.
- It's O.K. to hit others.
- When he grows up, it is O.K. to hit his own children.

Sometimes your baby will not be happy with the decisions you make and will make a fuss. You even may be tempted to give in to his demands. But keep in mind that setting limits is necessary for your child's safety and welfare.

It is possible to set limits while allowing your child the freedom to explore and grow. Stick to those limits and be firm in your guidance. Even when you are setting limits, your baby knows that you care for him.

No, No. If your baby tries to play with something that is unsafe, tell her "No, that is not for you." At the same time, remove her from the area and give her something else to explore. Soon your child will understand the meaning of **no** and might even imitate you by shaking her head.

Have You Written in Your Diary Lately?

You might want to include some notes in your diary or on your kitchen calendar about how Baby is starting to move around. Doesn't it seem like ages when he couldn't move an inch?

Do You Ever Feel Trapped?

Taking care of a baby and providing for healthy development is no small task. Sometimes parents feel trapped.

The birth of a baby does bring limitations to your life. At first, the newness of the experience and the excitement of having the baby at home overpowers a parent's feelings of restriction. But sooner or later,

most parents begin to feel that they will never be themselves again because of all the energy—both physical and mental—that the baby requires. This feeling is normal, but don't allow it to continue. Plan some time for yourself. This may mean leaving the baby with someone else—which can be a good learning experience for baby, as well as a little freedom for you.

If you work outside the home, you still need to plan some fun time for yourself and some romantic times for you and your spouse.

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