HEALTH BASICS

Developmental milestones record - 4 months

A 4-month developmental milestones record tracks skills a baby is learning around this age.

WHAT IT IS
A record of skills observed around four months

WHERE IT COMES UP
Child health visits and home developmental tracking

WHY IT MATTERS
Helps identify when closer developmental assessment may help

WHAT IT IS NOT
Not a diagnosis or pass-fail test

WHO TO ASK
A pediatrician, family doctor, nurse, or health visitor

HOW IT IS CHECKED
Caregiver report, observation, and developmental screening

Overview

A 4-month developmental milestones record is a checklist or written account of skills your baby is learning around 4 months of age. It may be part of a child health record, clinic questionnaire, website, or app.

Developmental milestones are actions that most children can do by a certain age. They cover movement, communication, learning, and social interaction. Current US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention checklists include milestones that at least 75% of children are expected to show by the listed age.

The record is not a test that your baby passes or fails. Babies do not develop every skill on the same day, and one missing item does not establish that anything is wrong. The record helps you and your baby's healthcare team notice patterns over time.

If your baby was born more than three weeks early, the clinician may use corrected age when interpreting development. Corrected age is calculated from the baby's due date rather than the date of birth. It is commonly considered during the first two years.

How it works

A 4-month record combines what you have seen at home with what a clinician observes during a visit. You may be asked whether your baby does each action regularly, has done it only once, or has not yet done it.

Examples of milestones listed by the CDC for 4 months include:

These examples are grouped into social and emotional, communication, thinking, and movement skills. The groups overlap. For example, turning toward your voice involves hearing, attention, movement, and social interest.

Observation conditions matter. A tired, hungry, unwell, or overwhelmed baby may not show a familiar skill during an appointment. Some skills are easier to see at home. Notes or a short video can help show what you have observed, but they do not replace an assessment when there is a concern.

Milestone monitoring is different from developmental screening . Monitoring means watching development over time. Screening uses a structured questionnaire or assessment designed to identify children who may benefit from further evaluation. Neither one provides a diagnosis by itself.

- Smiling to get your attention and chuckling when you interact
- Making cooing sounds and replying with sounds when spoken to
- Turning toward the sound of your voice
- Looking at their hands with interest
- Opening their mouth when seeing a breast or bottle if hungry
- Holding their head steady when supported upright
- Bringing their hands to their mouth
- Holding a toy placed in their hand and swinging at toys
- Pushing up onto elbows or forearms during tummy time

Why it matters for your health

The record gives you a practical way to discuss your baby's development. Rather than relying on a general impression, you can describe what your baby does, when it started, and whether it happens consistently.

This can help a clinician decide whether development appears appropriate for your baby's age

and circumstances. It can also show whether closer observation, a hearing or vision check, formal developmental screening, or referral for assessment would be useful.

Early attention matters because developmental support can often begin before the cause of a concern is known. Depending on the issue, support may involve physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language services, hearing services, or an early childhood development program.

The record also helps prevent normal differences from being treated as diagnoses. A single "not yet" answer may simply mean that the skill is emerging, was not seen, or is being judged using chronological rather than corrected age. Clinicians consider the whole pattern, including pregnancy and birth history, health, movement, hearing, vision, feeding, and interaction.

What can go wrong

The main concern is not the record itself. It is whether the observations suggest a developmental difference that deserves assessment.

A baby who is not yet showing several expected skills may have a developmental delay , meaning that skills are developing later than expected. Depending on the pattern, delayed milestones can relate to hearing loss, reduced vision, muscle or movement problems, cerebral palsy, genetic conditions, neurological conditions, or the effects of premature birth or illness. Sometimes no specific medical cause is found.

The checklist can also be misleading if it is treated too rigidly. Common problems include using the wrong age for a baby born early, marking a skill based on one uncertain event, or comparing babies without considering their individual circumstances.

Unequal movement may be important. For example, consistently using one side much less than the other is worth discussing. So are unusual stiffness, marked floppiness, difficulty controlling the head, limited response to sound, or little social engagement. These observations do not identify a condition on their own.

Loss of a skill is different from taking longer to gain it. Contact your baby's healthcare service promptly if your baby stops doing something they previously did consistently. Arrange routine follow-up if several milestones are not yet present, you are unsure about hearing or vision, or you have any continuing concern. You do not need to wait for the next scheduled checklist.

Milestone concerns alone are not usually emergencies. Seek emergency help if your baby is struggling to breathe, becomes blue or grey, has a seizure, is unusually difficult to wake, or suddenly becomes limp or unresponsive.

What you can do

Use the record to capture specific observations rather than trying to produce a perfect score. You can write down when you first noticed a skill, whether it happens often, and what was happening at the time.

Useful actions include:

You can support opportunities for development through ordinary interaction. Talk, sing, read, smile, and respond to your baby's sounds. Offer safe objects that are easy to hold. Give supervised tummy time while your baby is awake, using shorter sessions if needed. Always place your baby on their back for sleep.

There is no home activity that can guarantee when a milestone will appear. Do not force a position or movement, and do not use the checklist to blame yourself or your baby. If an activity seems uncomfortable or your baby has a medical or movement issue, ask for individual advice.

- Bring the completed record to child health appointments
- Ask whether corrected age should be used after premature birth
- Record concerns about hearing, vision, movement, feeding, or interaction
- Ask whether a formal developmental screen or other assessment is appropriate
- Keep short videos of movements or interactions that are difficult to describe
- Request an interpreter if language could affect the discussion

Common questions

Does my baby need to show every listed milestone on the day they turn 4 months?

No. The age is a reference point, not a deadline at midnight. Look at the overall pattern and discuss missing or uncertain skills with a healthcare professional, especially if several areas are involved.

Is a milestone checklist a developmental test?

No. It is a monitoring tool. A formal developmental screen uses a structured, validated method. Further assessment may be needed to understand an abnormal screening result.

What age should I use if my baby was premature?

Ask whether to use corrected age. To estimate it, subtract the number of weeks early from your baby's chronological age. A clinician can confirm the calculation and explain how long it

should guide interpretation.

Should I compare my baby with another 4-month-old?

Direct comparisons are usually not helpful. Babies may reach individual skills at different times. Compare your baby's development over time and use an age-appropriate record as a discussion tool.

What if my baby shows a skill at home but not during the appointment?

Tell the clinician what you have seen and how often it happens. A note or video may provide useful context. The clinician will consider both your report and the examination.

Do missing milestones mean my baby has autism?

No. A 4-month record cannot diagnose autism or determine why a skill is not yet present. Concerns about social communication should still be recorded and discussed so development can be followed appropriately.

Sources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Milestones by 4 Months
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Developmental Monitoring and Screening
- American Academy of Pediatrics: Promoting Optimal Development-Identifying Infants and Young Children With Developmental Disorders Through Developmental Surveillance and Screening , Pediatrics , 2020
- American Academy of Pediatrics, HealthyChildren.org: Corrected Age for Preemies
- World Health Organization: Motor Development Milestones