



One of the most frequently asked question that parents of preterm or sick infants ask is “When will my baby catch up?”

Preterm and sick newborns generally follow the same developmental patterns as babies who are full term and not sick. However, full term babies will often reach developmental milestones sooner than babies who are preterm, or who have been sick. It is important to remember that even full term and healthy babies develop at different rates. No two babies are alike. Just because your baby is not doing all the things the neighbor's baby is doing does not mean that your baby is slow; rather, since your baby was either ill or preterm he/she needs a little extra catching up time. For example, most full term babies begin to sit up at six months of age. A baby born two months early may not do this until eight months of age.

Knowing that your baby is making progress, doing something this week that he/she could not do last week is a very good indicator that he/she is developing properly. For many NICU babies, it may take several years to fully catch up with their peers.

As babies grow bigger and stronger, they develop many new and different skills. These new abilities include mental, motor or movement skills, and eventually, social, communication and language skills. Babies develop properly when their parents and other caregivers play with them frequently and provide them with a variety of interesting things to see and do.

Mental development occurs with a child's increasing ability to use their senses to absorb information about his/her surroundings and take an active interest in solving problems. The greater the range of experiences that babies are exposed to, the more interested they become in their new world.

Motor development includes the development of skills such as rolling over, sitting, standing and walking, and the fine motor skills required in reaching for and exploring objects. Smiling and talking to babies when they do something new, helps them feel good about themselves and encourages them to practice their new abilities.

Social Development occurs as a child interacts with parents, siblings, family and eventually with friends. Babies gradually learn to recognize familiar and unfamiliar people. It is special for parents to watch their babies begin to smile. At first, babies share their smiles with anyone who smiles at them. With time, a baby often becomes more selective with smiles and may even become fearful of strangers. This is a perfectly normal stage of development.

Language development takes place as a child listens to, imitates and understands words, and eventually speaks. this is why it is so important for parents, family and other caregivers to speak and interact often with their babies.