GENERAL

baby development week by week

Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Baby Development Week by Week: A Detailed Guide for Expecting Parents

Expecting a baby is an exciting journey filled with anticipation, questions, and a healthy dose of wonder. One of the most common inquiries you'll hear from friends, family, or even your own healthcare provider is, "How does a baby develop week by week?" Understanding the milestones your little one will reach each week can help you feel more connected to the growth happening inside your womb, and can also give you a realistic sense of what to expect during pregnancy and beyond.

This comprehensive guide breaks down the typical developmental stages from conception through the first year, organized by week. We'll cover physical changes, sensory milestones, motor skills, and the emotional and social development that begins even before birth. While every baby is unique, the information below reflects the average progression for a healthy pregnancy and infant. If you have specific concerns, always consult your obstetrician or pediatrician.

Weeks 1–4: The Early Foundations

Week 1: The Start of a New Life

During the first week of pregnancy, the fertilized egg (zygote) begins its journey to the uterus. It travels through the fallopian tube, dividing into a cluster of cells. While you might not yet be aware of a pregnancy, this is the moment where the groundwork for a new life is laid.

Week 2: Implantation Begins

By week two, the zygote has become a blastocyst—a hollow ball of cells. It starts to attach to the uterine lining, a process called implantation. This attachment is crucial for the embryo to receive nutrients and oxygen from the mother's bloodstream.

Week 3: The Formation of the Neural Tube

Now, the embryo is roughly the size of a poppy seed. The neural tube, the precursor to the brain and spinal cord, begins to form. This is the earliest indication that the brain and nervous system are developing.

Week 4: The Heart Starts to Beat

By the end of the fourth week, the embryo is about the size of a sesame seed. The heart has formed and starts beating, usually detectable via ultrasound. The embryo is now considered a fetus.

Weeks 5–8: Rapid Growth and Organ Development

Week 5: The Heart Becomes More Defined

- The fetal heart is now visible on an ultrasound.
- Blood vessels are forming.
- Early limb buds appear.

Week 6: The Brain Expands

- The brain is roughly the size of a lentil.

- Early eye structures develop.
- The embryo’s body begins to elongate.

Week 7: Facial Features Start to Shape

- Small, bud-like lips and eyelids form.
- Finger and toe buds appear.
- Brain continues to grow rapidly.

Week 8: The First Signs of Movement

- Muscles develop enough to create subtle movements.
- Early facial expressions may appear.
- By the end of week eight, the fetus is about the size of a kidney bean.

Weeks 9–12: Establishing the Body’s Blueprint

Week 9: The Beginning of the Nervous System

- Neural pathways begin to form.
- Brain weight increases by 40%.
- Early hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes develop.

Week 10: The Heart Continues to Mature

- Heartbeat may now be heard with a Doppler.
- Eye structure continues to develop.
- Fetus is about the size of a small grape.

Week 11: The Development of the Digestive System

- Stomach and intestines form.
- Early tongue and palate shape.
- Fetus can produce saliva.

Week 12: The End of the First Trimester

- Fetus is about the size of a lime.
- All major organs are present, though still immature.
- Early bones are forming.

Weeks 13–16: The Second Trimester Begins

Week 13: The Fetus Gains Height

- Length is about 4.5 inches.
- Finger and toe nails form.
- First signs of breathing movements appear.

Week 14: Sensory Development

- Eyes are functional; eyelids can open and close.
- Ear structures develop, enabling hearing.
- Early taste buds appear.

Week 15: The Brain’s Rapid Growth

- Brain weight increases by 20%.
- Neural pathways connect brain regions.

- Fetus may begin to move its arms and legs.

Week 16: The Middle of the Second Trimester

- Fetus is about the size of a banana.
- Facial features are more defined.
- Early fingerprints start to form.

Weeks 17–20: Sensory Milestones and Physical Growth

Week 17: The Development of the Immune System

- White blood cells start to form.
- Fetus can respond to external stimuli.
- Skin begins to produce lanugo (fine hair).

Week 18: The Beginning of the Skin’s Protective Layer

- Amniotic fluid protects the fetus.
- First signs of a heartbeat rhythm.
- Fetus is about the size of a small orange.

Week 19: The Development of the Muscular System

- Muscles become more defined.
- Fetus may start to kick and move.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

Week 20: The Halfway Mark

- Fetus is about the size of a papaya.
- First ultrasound can reveal gender.
- Fetus can hear external sounds.

Weeks 21–24: Advanced Brain Development and Movement

Week 21: The Beginning of Reflexes

- Babies develop the rooting reflex (turning toward a stimulus).
- Finger and toe movements become more coordinated.
- Brain is about 1/3 of adult size.

Week 22: The Development of the Eyes

- Eye movements become smoother.
- Color vision begins to develop.
- Fetus may start to respond to light.

Week 23: The Development of the Respiratory System

- Bronchi and alveoli (air sacs) form.
- Fetus practices breathing movements.
- Fetus is about the size of a small pumpkin.

Week 24: The End of the Second Trimester

- Fetus can respond to external stimuli.
- Brain weight increases by 20%.
- Fetus is about the size of a small watermelon.

Weeks 25–28: The Third Trimester Begins

Week 25: The Development of the Skin and Hair

- Skin becomes thicker and less transparent.
- Lanugo (fine hair) covers the body.
- Fetus can close its eyes.

Week 26: The Beginning of the Immune System

- White blood cells increase.
- Fetus can produce antibodies.
- Brain continues to grow and develop.

Week 27: The Development of the Muscular System

- Muscles become more defined.
- Fetus can move its limbs more freely.
- Brain is about 50% of adult size.

Week 28: The Middle of the Third Trimester

- Fetus is about the size of a head of cauliflower.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.
- Fetus can respond to external stimuli.

Weeks 29–32: Final Preparations for Birth

Week 29: The Development of the Immune System

- White blood cells continue to increase.
- Fetus can produce antibodies.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

Week 30: The Development of the Respiratory System

- Bronchi and alveoli (air sacs) continue to develop.
- Fetus practices breathing movements.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

Week 31: The Development of the Brain

- Brain continues to grow and develop.
- Brain weight increases by 20%.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

Week 32: The End of the Third Trimester

- Fetus is about the size of a small watermelon.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

Weeks 33–36: Nearing the Final Stretch

Week 33: The Development of the Immune System

- White blood cells increase.
- Fetus can produce antibodies.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

Week 34: The Development of the Respiratory System

- Bronchi and alveoli (air sacs) form.
- Fetus practices breathing movements.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

Week 35: The Development of the Brain

- Brain continues to grow and develop.
- Brain weight increases by 20%.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

Week 36: The End of the Third Trimester

- Fetus is about the size of a small watermelon.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

Weeks 37–40: The Final Countdown

Week 37: The Development of the Immune System

- White blood cells increase.
- Fetus can produce antibodies.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

Week 38: The Development of the Respiratory System

- Bronchi and alveoli (air sacs) form.
- Fetus practices breathing movements.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

Week 39: The Development of the Brain

- Brain continues to grow and develop.
- Brain weight increases by 20%.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

Week 40: The End of Pregnancy

- Fetus is about the size of a small watermelon.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.
- Brain continues to develop complex connections.

First Year: Rapid Development and Milestones

Month 1 (Weeks 1–4): The

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