

EXTRACTION FROM THE DEVELOPMENT **MANUAL**

BIRTH TO FOUR MONTHS

MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

POSTURE AND MOVEMENT

The newborn baby is literally just a little "bundle" of humanity. He cannot control his head, his arms and legs are curled up against his body and his hands are closed into fists. When he lies on his stomach his head is turned to one side, his knees pulled up under his body with the bottom (pelvis) pointing upwards. Babies do not lie flat on any surface.

This flexed posture corresponds with the curved position of the fetus in the mother's womb. The infant's early motor development is therefore characterized by attempts to straighten the flexed body posture. An extended posture is necessary to keep the baby's head and back straight and the arms and legs have to extend if skills such as sitting, standing and walking are to be acquired later.

After a few days the baby starts to bend and straighten his limbs. At about six weeks the movements start getting stronger. When a baby lies on his stomach he may try to lift his head and even hold it in line with the rest of his body for a short while. A baby who is placed on his stomach often learns to pick up his head sooner than a baby who only lies on his back.

Regular, loving handling of the young baby is very important - not only to form a strong emotional bond between mother and child, but also for the baby's motor development. When a mother bathes, dresses or feeds her new baby she may not even realize that she is also promoting his motor development. When she picks him up initially she supports his head. The baby guides her in this and once his neck is stronger, she pulls him up by the arms. Without even thinking about it, she is stimulating his head control.

When she wants to fasten his jacket's buttons on the back, she turns him onto his stomach. While lying in this position, he tries to lift his head and improves his head control even further. It is actually wonderful how a mother promotes her baby's motor development by just handling him in the normal daily routine. A baby who still has to sleep a lot gets so much exercise through being bathed and dressed that after such a session he is exhausted and only wants to drink his milk and sleep.

When holding a baby it is a good idea to lull him slowly and rhythmically. This is not only pleasant for him but is also good for his development as he becomes aware of the change in his physical position through his vestibular system. It is also good for the baby to be placed in a safe position on a blanket on the carpet or floor from very early in his life. As seen earlier, placing him on the stomach sometimes is especially beneficial. Lifting his head not only improves his head and neck control, but also develops the necessary extension in

his body which is important for sitting and standing later.

FOUR MONTH OLD BABY

USE OF THE HANDS

If a *four-month-old* baby is lain down on his back, his hands go to the midline of his body. While holding his hands over his chest he plays with his fingers and watches his hands. He will hold out both hands to grasp a toy, hold it and put it in his mouth. The use of both hands together is referred to as midline orientation and is the beginning of co-ordination between the two sides of his body. This co-ordination develops as the baby gets older and forms an important basis for later development of hand dominance and manual skills.

If a mother finds that her baby does not move or use both hands and feet, constantly ignoring one side, it is advisable to obtain professional advice and determine whether both sides of his body function equally well.

A *four-month-old baby* can usually play with his rattle for short periods. When it is held out to him he will reach for it with both hands. He therefore starts grasping things intentionally but may still miss occasionally since his eye-hand co-ordination is not fully-developed yet. While holding it in one hand he can touch or shake it with the other. If it falls he will turn his head and look for it.

At *five months* the baby can start trying to hold his bottle or hit it with his hands while drinking. Breast-fed babies like to squeeze the breast or stroke the mother's skin. At this age the baby's eye-hand co-ordination has improved to such an extent that he can touch a toy he is looking at. He can pick up toys within his reach and may even try to pick up a beam of sunlight from the floor. He enjoys shaking toys and the more noise he can create, the better. He loves crumpling paper in his hands - a pastime which will give him great pleasure for months to come. He will still hold objects (for example a block) in the palm of his hand (palmar grip) instead of in his fingers. When offered a second block, he will drop the first to take it.

At about six months the baby starts using his two hands separately. It may, however, be either hand - dominance is only established much later. As mentioned before, the stage in which baby uses both hands together and brings them to the midline, is important and has to occur before he can use his hands singly and separately. Later, the two hands have to learn to work together on separate actions, unlike the initial baby stage when they were used together.

If a second block is offered to a *six-month-old*, he will take it without dropping the first one. He still holds it in the palm of his hand but more to the thumb's side. This grip is the forerunner of the grip he will use later where his thumb will feature much more when holding objects. Since he cannot oppose his thumb yet (bend it

to touch the fingers) it is still not used. When he puts out his hands now it is not with the palms turned up but with the thumb (semi-supination). He can also turn his wrists now which make it much easier to handle an object.

ACTIVITIES

- ❖ Take both your baby's hands and clapping them softly together you say "clap your hands."
- ❖ First put your baby's left hand and place it on his right leg. Then take the right hand and place that on his left leg.
- ❖ This activity can be repeated before or after bath time.
- ❖ While you are repeating this you should talk with your baby.
- ❖ Let your baby be seated on the floor. Roll a huge colorful ball towards his legs. Encourage your baby to stop the ball with both hands and to roll it back to you.
- ❖ While repeating this action tell your baby each time: " I am rolling the ball to you, do you see that?. It is rolling because it is round"

Your baby should have enough balance and control of his hands, before the age of one year, which would allow him to take part in this activity.

- ❖ You would need a wide variety of objects which differ in size and color, form, shape, texture and weight. Safety should be a precautionary method since a baby loves to put a thing in his/her mouth. These items should include objects like plastic containers with or without lids, containers with different sizes of wood, different pieces of material or fabric, some tins with lids so that you could keep a sugar cube in it, as to create a rattle. You could also have a variety of cotton reels, empty toilet rolls, sponges, egg cartons, some paper that could be torn into pieces by your baby and add all of these to his collection of toys. As a safety precaution you should always be careful to check all toys and playthings as not to be dangerous, i.e. too heavy, too sharp or too small. The above mentioned should already be more than enough for your baby to play with.
- ❖ As soon as the mother could let her baby-sit up straight in a bath with some support she could add some playthings and toys suitable for water/bathing time. Your baby would surely try to get hold of a important for the improvement of your baby's hand-eye co-ordination and the muscles in his hands and fingers, as he has to reach out, try to take it or touch it. If you could have colorful plastic rings it would be irresistible to your baby.
- ❖ Give your baby some plastic containers to play with in the bath. Show him/her how to fill it up with water and how to empty it again.
- ❖ Add some plastic toys to the bath. Use it squeeze it to make some noises and see if your baby could do the same. Encourage your baby by suppressing the toy under water and letting it go again. Explain to the baby what is happening.