It is exciting for new parents to watch their newborn’s behaviors and activities. However, many parents might not know what is considered “normal” newborn behavior. Babies develop at different rates, but they still display many of the same behaviors. Don’t be alarmed if your baby seems a little behind. This guide will help you learn what kind of behaviors to expect from your newborn so that you can tell if there is a problem.

If your baby was born prematurely, don’t compare his or her development to that of full-term newborns. Premature babies are often developmentally behind full-term babies. If your baby was born two months early, then he or she might be two months behind a full-term baby. Your doctor will follow the developmental progress of your premature baby. Contact your doctor if you think your baby is developing at an unusually delayed rate.
Newborn Reflexes

Reflexes are involuntary movements or actions. Some movements are spontaneous, occurring as part of the baby's usual activity. Others are responses to certain actions. Health care providers check reflexes to determine if the brain and nervous system are working well. Some reflexes occur only in specific periods of development. The following are some of the normal reflexes seen in newborn babies:

**Root Reflex**
This reflex begins when the corner of the baby's mouth is stroked or touched. The baby will turn his or her head and open his or her mouth to follow and “root” in the direction of the stroking. This helps the baby find the breast or bottle to begin feeding. This reflex lasts about 4 months.

**Moro Reflex**
The Moro reflex is often called a startle reflex because it usually occurs when a baby is startled by a loud sound or movement. In response to the sound, the baby throws back his or her head, extends out the arms and legs, cries, then pulls the arms and legs back in. A baby's own cry can startle him or her and trigger this reflex. This reflex lasts until the baby is about 5 to 6 months old.

**Grasp Reflex**
Stroking the palm of a baby’s hand causes the baby to close his or her fingers in a grasp. The grasp reflex lasts until the baby is about 5 to 6 months old.

**Babinski Reflex**
When the sole of the foot is firmly stroked, the big toe bends back toward the top of the foot and the other toes fan out. This normal reflex lasts until the child is about 2 years of age.

**Step Reflex**
This reflex is also called the walking or dance reflex because a baby appears to take steps or dance when held upright with his or her feet touching a solid surface. This reflex lasts about 2 months.
Newborn Sleep Patterns

The average newborn sleeps much of the day and night, waking only for feedings every few hours. It is often hard for new parents to know how long and how often a newborn should sleep. Unfortunately, there is no set schedule at first and many newborns have their days and nights confused. They think they are supposed to be awake at night and sleep during the day.

Generally, newborns sleep about 8 to 9 hours in the daytime and about 8 hours at night. Most babies do not begin sleeping through the night until closer to 1 year. Newborns and young infants have small stomachs and must wake every few hours to eat. In most cases, your baby will awaken and be ready to eat about every 3 hours. How often your baby will eat depends on what he or she is being fed and his or her age. Make sure you talk with your doctor to determine if it is necessary to wake a baby for feedings.

Watch for changes in your baby’s sleep pattern. If your baby has been sleeping consistently, and suddenly is waking, there may be a problem such as an ear infection. Some sleep disturbances are simply due to changes in development or because of overstimulation.

Most experts recommend allowing a baby to become sleepy in your arms, then placing him or her in the bed while still awake. This way the baby learns how to go to sleep on his own. Playing soft music while your baby is getting sleepy is also a good way to help establish a bedtime routine.
The baby’s body moves erratically, and he or she may cry loudly. Babies can easily be overstimulated during the crying phase. It is usually best to find a way of calming the baby and the environment. Holding a baby close or swaddling (wrapping snugly in a blanket) may help calm a crying baby.

It is usually best to feed babies before they reach the crying phase. During the crying phase, they can be so upset that they may refuse the breast or bottle. In newborns, crying is a late sign of hunger.

HELPING YOUR BABY SLEEP

Babies may not be able to establish their own sleeping and waking patterns, especially in going to sleep. You can help your baby sleep by recognizing signs of sleep readiness, teaching him/her to fall asleep on his or her own, and providing the right environment for comfortable and safe sleep.

Signs of Sleep Readiness
Your baby may show signs of being ready for sleep when you see the following signs:
- Rubbing eyes
- Yawning
- Looking away
- Fussing

This phase usually progresses to the active alert phase in which the baby is attentive to sounds and sights, and moves actively. After this phase is a crying phase.

SLEEP PATTERNS (CONT’D)

What are the different alert phases of a newborn?
Babies also have differences in how alert they are during the time they are awake. When a newborn awakens at the end of the sleep cycles, there is typically a quiet alert phase. This is a time when the baby is very still, but awake and taking in the environment. During the quiet alert time, babies may look or stare at objects, and respond to sounds and motion.

This phase usually progresses to the active alert phase in which the baby is attentive to sounds and sights, and moves actively. After this phase is a crying phase.
Newborn Senses

Babies are born with all of the senses — sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Some of the senses are not fully developed. The newborn's senses are as follows:

**Sight**
Over the first few months, babies may have uncoordinated eye movements and may even appear cross-eyed. Babies are born with the ability to focus only at close range — about 8 to 10 inches or the distance between a mother's face to the baby in her arms. Babies are able to follow or track an object in the first few weeks of life. Focus improves over the first 2 to 3 years of life to a normal 20/20 vision. Newborns can detect light and dark but cannot see all colors. This is why many baby books and infant toys have distinct black and white patterns.

**Hearing**
During pregnancy, many mothers find that the baby may kick or jump in response to loud noises and quiet with soft, soothing music. Hearing is fully developed in newborns. Babies with normal hearing should startle in response to loud sounds. These babies will also pay quiet attention to the mother's voice, and briefly stop moving when sound at a conversational level is begun. Newborns seem to prefer a higher-pitched voice (the mother's) to a low sounding voice (males). They also have the ability to tune out loud noises after hearing them several times. Newborns are screened while still in the hospital.

**Smell**
Studies have found that newborns have a strong sense of smell. Newborns prefer the smell of their own mother, especially to her breast milk.

**Taste**
Babies prefer sweet tastes over sour or bitter tastes. Babies also show a strong preference for breast milk and breastfeeding, especially if they are breastfed and then offered formula or a bottle.

**Touch**
Babies are comforted by touch. Placing a hand on the baby's abdomen, or cuddling close can help a baby feel more secure. Swaddling (wrapping snugly in a blanket) is another technique used to help babies feel secure. Some mothers find their babies are comforted when “worn” in a sling or carrier. Holding a baby for feedings is also important. Breastfeeding ensures that a baby spends several hours in mother's arms. Although bottle-feeding of breast milk may also be done.
Newborn Crying

The first cries of a newborn baby are often music to the ears of parents. However, over the next weeks and months, this “music” can become grating and painful. This is especially true when all attempts fail to stop the crying.

Surprisingly, crying does not produce tears until after the first month or two. Crying is the way babies communicate. Babies cry because of hunger, discomfort, frustration, fatigue, and even loneliness. Sometimes, cries can easily be answered with food or a diaper change. Other times, it can be a mystery and crying stops as quickly as it begins.

You will soon learn differences in cries, from a cry of “I’m hungry” to “I’ve been overstimulated.” It is important to respond to your baby’s cries. Contrary to old wives’ tales, young babies cannot be spoiled by being picked up when crying. Being held is reassuring and comforting when a baby cannot express him/herself any other way.

Some techniques to help console a crying baby include the following:

■ Take care of physical problems first – hunger, diaper change, burping, cooling, or warming the baby.
■ Walk with baby in a sling or in a stroller.
■ Rock your baby in a rhythmic, gentle motion.
■ Try a baby swing or rocking cradle.
■ Gently pat or stroke on the back or chest.
■ Swaddling the baby.
■ Go for a ride in the car.
■ Turn on some white noise (such as a washing machine or vacuum cleaner).
■ Make “shushing” sounds for the baby.
■ Offer a pacifier (or nurse).

No matter how frustrated you may become, NEVER SHAKE A BABY. This can cause severe injury to the baby’s fragile brain.

If you become angry or frustrated, allow someone else to take over for a while. If you are alone, put the baby down in a safe place, such as the crib, and go to another room for a few moments. This will give you time to collect yourself. Then you can return to your baby and try a different way to comfort your baby.

Sources: westbomedctr.staywellsolutionsonline.com/Library/DiseasesConditions/Pediatric/Newborn/90/P02630; westbomedctr.staywellsolutionsonline.com/Library/DiseasesConditions/Pediatric/Newborn/90/P02632; westbomedctr.staywellsolutionsonline.com/Library/DiseasesConditions/Pediatric/Newborn/90/P02631; westbomedctr.staywellsolutionsonline.com/Search/90,P02648