



Wee Beginner (0 - 18 months): Signs Your Baby is Going Through a Growth Spurt

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Wee Beginner (0 – 18 months): Signs Your Baby is Going Through a Growth Spurt

A baby who is suddenly hungrier and crankier than usual could be showing signs of a growth spurt.

If your baby seems to fit that sweet little onesie one day, and have it busting at the seams the next, it may not be your sleep-deprived eyes playing tricks on you. She might be having a major growth spurt—one of many that babies experience in their first 12 months.

Although growth spurts can happen at any time, it's common for them to hit at about 10 days, between three and six weeks, and several times afterward, often around three months, six months and nine months. And when a spurt strikes, it can be fast and furious; babies can measurably gain weight and length in just 24 hours, says Michelle Lampl, a doctor and growth researcher at Emory University in Atlanta. Her studies show that tots can sprout as much as nine millimetres in length in just one day. Wondering if your babe is in the midst of a spurt? Here's what you might notice.

She'll sleep like a log (or be up all night)

In the day or so before a big growth spurt, some babies sleep more than usual. "There are important physiological changes that happen during sleep that are essential for growth," says Peter Nieman, a paediatrician and assistant clinical professor at the University of Calgary medical school. Don't wake her for feedings unless it's within the first week and advised by your care provider. "She needs her rest, and she'll make up for milk or formula she missed at her next feeding," he says.

She'll be hungry

Some babies prefer food to snoozing during a spurt. Even if she was starting to sleep longer stretches at night, your baby may suddenly want to eat around the clock again.

If you're breastfeeding, don't worry; your body will keep pace with baby's appetite. (If you have real concerns that you're not producing enough milk, talk to your doctor.) Be sure to drink plenty of fluids and recruit your partner or a family member to help with everything that can't be done with a babe in arms until the spurt passes. If you're using formula, increase the amount you're giving very gradually—there is a danger of overfeeding. "If your baby starts spitting up more than usual she's probably getting too much," says Nieman.

She'll be cranky

Frequent fussing can be normal for a few days during a growth spurt. "This can seem rather dramatic at the time, but it doesn't last very long, and babies will calm down after their growth spurt," says Lampl. Lots of cuddling and reassurance in the meantime will help to soothe her.





Wee Beginner (0 – 18 months): Signs Your Baby is Going Through a Growth Spurt (cont'd)

This too shall pass

You may feel like that spurt will never end, but it will. Most growth spurts only last a couple of days. Not convinced that a growth spurt is to blame? Shifts in mood, feeding habits and sleep schedule can also mean that she's getting sick, starting to teethe (if she's older than three months) or just needing extra comfort due to a change in routine. Talk to your doctor if you're concerned that her symptoms might be something more, but don't stress about exactly how much your baby is growing, or when, and don't compare her size to that of other babies. At each wellness visit, your doctor will track her growth (measuring length, head circumference and weight). As long as she's gaining steadily and proportionally there's no reason to sweat exact ounces or inches, says Neiman. "All babies grow at their own rate and speed—they know what they're doing."

Excerpts taken from

<http://www.todaysparent.com/baby/signs-your-baby-going-through-a-growth-spurt/>





Wee Explorer (18 months – 3 years) – How to get your toddler to tidy up

“Oh, look! Here! Bear, ball, blocks!” 21-month-old Maya cheerfully chants, announcing each new toy as she picks them up to bring to the corresponding basket. Like most toddlers, Maya is happy to be a helper. Her mother, Patricia Chraiteh, from Toronto, has been encouraging her to put her playthings back since Maya was about a year old, using short, specific commands, such as “Bring me Dora,” or “Let’s collect our blocks.”

“If your child has the motor skills to pick things up and can understand what you’re asking, the earlier she does it, the better. It’s so much harder to teach good habits later”, says Michele Kambolis, a registered child and family therapist and founder of Harbourside Counseling Centre in Vancouver.

Saving yourself the frustration of having to clean up after your kids later isn’t the only reason to encourage your toddler to keep her toys organized. The mindfulness of the activity develops an important area of the brain (the mid-prefrontal cortex) that’s associated with attention span, problem-solving, and mood and body regulation — just don’t expect it to be the fastest way to clean her room. But with a little patience and consistent practice, she will eventually make it a habit of her own.

Make it fun

Toronto mom Toni Brem Mullen uses a song to signal cleanup time for her two-and-a-half-year-old son, Charlie, or her husband sometimes stages it as a race with Charlie’s four-year-old brother, Oliver. Keeping it pleasant is key. If it’s important for your child to hold on to a certain toy he just can’t bear to put away, that’s OK, says Kambolis. “Because toddlers see toys as extensions of themselves, it really is a developmental milestone for them to let go of something and put it away.”

Offer positive reinforcement

Reward your little helper with high-fives and hugs, and reiterate how nice it is that everyone can walk around and not have hurt feet, and that the toys will be easy to find. Some kids may respond better to sticker charts in order for the behaviour to become a habit. Instead of threatening time outs, try using a preferred activity as motivation for finishing the task, such as a trip to the park after all the puzzles are put away.





Wee Explorer (18 months – 3 years) – How to get your toddler to tidy up (cont'd)

Be realistic

Some days your little one will be too cranky to clean. And it's OK to not always have time to get everything put away; instead, work together for two minutes on some of the mess rather than falling into the habit of doing everything yourself. Don't be discouraged if your toddler doesn't find cleaning naturally rewarding, says Kambolis. "As long as you stick to this path, sooner or later she will clean up independently. When that time comes depends on her temperament."

For Mullen, her littlest one is turning out to take longer to get into a routine. "Oliver has always been an old soul who could consistently be reasoned with," she says. "Charlie is much more of a free spirit, so for now we make it a game. And you'd never hear an expert recommend it, but I can pretty much get him to do anything for a lollipop."

Excerpts taken from <http://www.todaysparent.com/toddler/how-to-get-your-toddler-to-tydy-up/>





Wee Builder (3 – 4 years) – How to Deal with a Sensitive Preschooler

There aren't many three-year-olds who don't cry when their favourite toy gets broken or when they fall and skin their knee.

But what about the kid who get upset and overwhelmed by nearly everything life throws at them: an unfamiliar food on their plate, a change in plans, an itchy tag on their T-shirt. They seem to cry at the drop of a hat and they can take ages to calm down.

"Sensitivity is a personality trait. Some kids are just born more sensitive than others," says Dr. Maggie Mamen, a family psychologist in Ottawa. "Some kids have a built-in resilience and others just have more trouble processing their environment."

Those who are deeply sensitive to things such as social interactions and changes in routine need a calm, caring adult to help them navigate those emotional waters. The trouble is, it can be extremely frustrating for parents to deal with endless whining and crying – especially if you're trying to get through the grocery line or drop your child off at daycare and get to work!

So first, try to step back and take a deep breath, which is sometimes – admittedly – easier said than done. Then, start by empathizing with your child: "I know you wanted to go to grandma's house, and it's really disappointing. I wanted to go, too." Validating her feelings can open the compression valve and allow her to let off steam. Ask if she'd like to be held, if she'd like you to stay close by, or if she wants to be left alone. Different kids respond to different methods. But be sure to only give it a few minutes.

"It's important for your child to gradually learn how to pull herself together, and that you will listen when she stops crying," says Dr. Mamen. "Tell her to let you know when she is ready to talk and use her words." After she calms down, gently move on and don't dwell on what made her so upset.

Later on, it might be useful to revisit the situation and ask her to talk about what she was feeling, and focus on how it turned out okay in the end.

"As they get older, children can process previous experiences and use their memories to integrate them into a current situation, so the next time it happens they can deal with it better," says Dr. Mamen.





Wee Builder (3 – 4 years) – How to Deal with a Sensitive Preschooler (cont'd.)

It's also useful for parents to look at potential meltdown triggers: Was it before a mealtime? Had she missed her nap that morning? Sometimes eliminating something from her diet (such as wheat, dairy or certain dyes) can make a huge difference.

Sometimes looking at your own reactions can be revealing, too. "Crying can get parents into a protective mode, or can be so irritating that we just give in to what they want. As with any behaviour, there may be a secondary gain from crying, such as having an advantage over a sibling or getting attention from their parents. It can be a learned behaviour; if it works, then they do it again. And that can be a slippery slope."

Excerpt taken from

<http://www.parentscanada.com/preschool/how-to-deal-with-a-sensitive-preschooler>





Wee Learner (4 – 5 years) – The Benefits of Nurturing Your Child's Imagination

Creativity and imagination are still valuable traits in this goal-oriented world. Here's how to encourage your little daydreamer.

Promote Play

One of the best things about childhood is the freedom imaginative play provides—unscripted entertainment with no expectations. “Kids are really lucky because they don’t understand the way the world is set up. They are not programmed the way we are programmed to work within an established set of parameters,” says Carol Shirley, a registered psychologist in Halifax.

Whether it is pretending to be astronauts or fairies, kids nurture a number of abilities when they engage in make-believe, says Dr. Sandra Russ, a psychology professor at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio, whose research focuses on how pretend play is involved in child development. “Imagination in play relates to coping ability, emotional regulation and understanding emotions,” she says. “But the strongest relationship is between pretend play and creativity and the ability to come up with different and original ideas to solve a problem.”

This ability to improvise is crucial as we age, believes Allen MacInnis, artistic director of Toronto’s Young People’s Theatre. “The truth is we need our imagination throughout our lives,” he says. MacInnis notes that as adults we are often called upon to predict or imagine the consequences of an action or to come up with solutions to problems. “I don’t think we’re going to be very good at that if we haven’t actively nurtured imagination as kids.”

In addition to play being a creative outlet, many children use it to process their emotions. Research shows that play can help reduce anxiety in children, notes Dr. Russ. “Where adults talk through their problems, children play them out.”

How To Spark Imagination

Passive pursuits have their place, but when children have some role in an activity, they become engaged in the creative process. “If we merely put them in front of things, such as a movie or television, it might take them to a fantastical world, but the kids have no responsibility for making any part of that real,” explains MacInnis. “That’s why live performance and theatre is a good tool for that. Kids have to use some of their own imagination to fill it in. We are leaving some work for them to do.” Here are some other ways to get the creative juices flowing:

Carve out free time. Extra-curricular activities are the norm for children this age, but set aside time in your child’s day for play. Let your child determine what she does in that unstructured time, suggests Dr. Russ.





Wee Learner (4 – 5 years) The Benefits of Nurturing Your Child's Imagination (cont'd)

Encourage creative outlets. Drama or art classes certainly stimulate imagination; however, MacInnis makes a case for programs that are not focused on a performance or a show at the completion of the course. "If it is all about being directed by adults to copy what those adults tell the kids to do, then I don't think there is a huge stimulation of their imagination." Creative classes can be more complex as a child ages, he adds.

Read to your child. Take time to share a story with your child even if she can read. "The act of listening and the kind of lovely intimacy that can happen between parent and child when the parent is reading the words have a powerful way of stimulating the imagination," says MacInnis. "You're experiencing the story together."

Fantasy vs. Reality

It is not uncommon for parents to worry about their little daydreamer or wonder if their child's fantasy-play is normal. It's because we want to make sure our kids are socially acceptable and that they fit in, explains Shirley. It is when their fantasy-play interferes with daily functioning that it becomes an issue. If you are concerned about your child's social skills or that she is having trouble telling the difference between fantasy and reality, consult a mental health professional.

<http://www.canadianfamily.ca/parents/the-benefits-of-nurturing-your-childs-imagination/>





Wee Expert (5 – 6 years) – What's wrong with being shy?

How can I help her climb out of her shell?

We often follow our child's lead when it comes to pulling away or moving in. When a child is outgoing or a chatterbox, it's easier to pull back, knowing that your child can talk or find her way through different situations. When a child appears more vulnerable or afraid, it's easy to jump in quickly – even to speak on her behalf, as you say you do, so that she doesn't have to endure any discomfort. Unfortunately, speaking on her behalf may only make it harder for her to find her own voice.

It's true that temperament shows itself early and can determine how a child handles social situations. However, there are other factors:

- Parent example: A child may model behaviours of a parent who feels less comfortable in the company of others.
- Parent expectations: If a parent regularly explains a child's behaviour by saying he's "shy", the behaviour may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, a parent may unintentionally perpetuate "shy" behaviour by labeling it.

Actually, there's nothing wrong with being "shy." Yet some parents urge their children not to cling or hide behind them when out socially. My reading of this is that parents may think of shyness as a negative behaviour and may feel that others, too, perceive their child as lacking in self-confidence, for example. Perhaps a reframing of shyness might help. In fact, in some cases, a child's pulling back to observe and assess the situation before deciding when and how to interact with others may be better than jumping in with great gusto. Your daughter may just need a little more time to warm up to others.

When a child is very young, hiding behind her parent may not be shyness, but her way of saying that the situation is overwhelming and that she needs her parent as a buffer. If this happens to you, rather than forcing her out from behind you, try to understand her needs and let her come forward gradually. On the other hand, try not to speak on her behalf or overprotect your reticent child from interacting with others.

Bottom line: Allow your daughter to emerge at her own pace and recognize that there are many different points between shy and outgoing. Avoid labeling her as shy. This will help her develop an ability to function comfortably without you when she is in social environments, such as school.

<http://www.parentscanada.com/school/help-me-sara-what-s-wrong-with-being-shy>





Wee Mentor (6+ years) – Power Down and Sleep Better

Poll links kids' lack of sleep to use of electronic devices too close to bedtime

Is your child getting enough rest? The annual Sleep in America poll, conducted by the National Sleep Foundation, finds that most kids are getting at least one hour less sleep per night than experts recommend. The poll examines a variety of sleep-related issues, from how exercise affects rest to how kids sleep on school nights.

According to the foundation, the deficiency in kids' sleep is closely related to the presence of electronic devices in their bedrooms. About 75 percent of elementary school and middle school children have access to electronics in their bedrooms, and the number grows to nearly 90 percent for high schoolers. The extra stimulation, light and sound from electronics make it much harder for children to relax and head into dreamland.

The National Sleep Foundation recommends limiting the amount of screen time near bedtime and eliminating it completely an hour before turning in to ensure children get enough sleep. Instead, the foundation suggests unplugged activities, such as conversation, reading, playing non-electronic games or relaxing in any way that does not involve televisions, tablets or texting.

Keep in mind, adults should lead by example for the kids' sake and for their own. Adults, too, regularly fall short of the recommended amount of sleep, and much of this has to do with having phones and tablets at hand in the bedroom. The foundation's survey showed that parents who enforced a rule of no electronics in the bedroom, including their own, fostered a more well-rested home.

Lack of sleep shouldn't be taken lightly; it's a serious problem for kids and adults of all ages. It can lead to decreased concentration in school, a weakened immune system, increased risk of obesity and moodiness. Take an honest look at your children's nightly amount of sleep and determine whether they might be sleep deprived. Kids ages 5 to 12 should be getting about 10 to 11 hours of sleep a night. Teenagers need less sleep, but they should still be getting 8.5 to 9.5 hours of sleep. According to the National Sleep Foundation, only about 15 percent of teens are getting the recommended amount of sleep each night.

<http://www.parenting.com/child/sleep/power-down-and-sleep-better>

