

My Nine-Month-Old and Me

Your baby is now showing more evidence of personality! You will find her exerting her own will more at this age. It is a fun age due to great leaps in development, but a few challenges await you. Please, read on!

At 9 months your baby has developed many new skills:

- **Crawling** — Your baby may initially "scoot" or "army crawl" to get around. Some babies even roll or bounce on their bottoms to get places. Seeing your baby crawl is an exciting time, but it can also be an exhausting time. He must be more closely monitored now that he is mobile because he can get into a cabinet or put something dangerous in his mouth in a split second. It is best to make things easier by taking time to baby-proof your home and it will cut down on a lot of "No touch." If you need to step away for a moment, place him in a safe spot such as his crib with some toys to amuse him or his swing or bouncer. But generally it is best for him to have a chance to move and crawl all around!
- **Pull to stand**- Your baby may already be pulling up to standing in his crib or by using furniture. Be sure to run through all the Home Baby Proofing Tips at the end of this page.
- **Cruising**- Once your baby is standing he will walk with assistance. He may use the coffee table or your hand to help support himself while he is learning to walk.
- **Babbling** - Your baby will make many babbling sounds with consonants. "Dadada" is very common at this age, but you should hear some "Mamama" sounds now especially when crying. Your baby will say these early words non-specifically at this point.
- **Pincher Grasp** - Instead of using the whole hand to pick up objects, your baby will use 2-3 fingers. This is a sign that your baby is ready for finger foods (bits of cut up foods).

Ideas for play:

- **PattyCake**- Singing pattycake games are not only fun for your baby but they will stimulate his memory skills and fine motor skills
- **Peek-a-boo**- As your baby learns object permanence (knowing objects still exist even when out of sight) you can play variations of peek-a-boo. For example, drape a cloth over her head and ask, "Where's the baby?" Once she understands the game she'll pull off the cloth herself!
- **Read books daily**- Make reading a part of the daily routine whether it occurs during the day or before bedtime. Reading stimulates your baby's brain while learning new words and objects. If a child has grown up loving books, he will enjoy reading books independently when that time comes.
- **Visit the local park** - This is a great way to meet other parents of young children in your neighborhood. Parks are usually equipped with small slides and baby swings for the infant age group.

- **Play Groups** - It is important for your baby to see other people at this age to help practice her interactions with “strangers.” Look into play groups through your church or temple, local library infant story times, Little Gym Parent/Child activity classes (<http://www.thelittlegym.com/houstonbellairetx/>), Musikgarten parent/ baby music classes (<http://www.mgbellaire.com/>) or just hang out with friends and relatives who have children of similar ages. These are opportunities for her to warm up to others while she is at your side, then venture off with other babies while you are still there. You will notice that she will look back or crawl back to you often for reassurance.
- **Child Care** - Now is the time for your baby to adjust to some separation from you for short periods of time. Separation anxiety will increase over the next 6 months, so it’s best to practice now while it’s pretty easy to separate. Start with an informal arrangement like dropping Baby off with a trusted relative for an hour. Plan ahead to register for a more formal arrangement that offers on-site childcare or a short drop off time (3 hours or less):
 - ❖ MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers, birth to 5 yo) <http://www.mops.org/>
 - ❖ Church nurseries
 - ❖ YMCA group classes (Child Watch available) <https://www.ymcahouston.org/health-wellness/group-exercise/>
 - ❖ Motherhood Center offers health and fitness classes for new moms <http://www.motherhoodcenter.com/pregnancy-parenting-classes/new-baby-new-you-workshop/>
 - ❖ Mother’s Day Out Programs recommended:
 - Faith Lutheran Day School/ Mother’s Day Out <https://faithbellaire.org/learning/day-school/> (12 mos +)
 - Beth Yeshurun Day School <http://byds.org/academics/early-childhood> (15 mos +)
 - School for Little Children <http://bellaireumc.org/preschool> (15 months +)

Sleeping:

- Your baby should have 12 hours of uninterrupted sleep at nighttime with two naps during the day. Most babies at this age take a short morning nap, longer mid-day nap and have completely dropped the afternoon nap.
- Although your baby may have been sleeping well through the night, at 9 months, with his newly developed mobility and development of Separation Anxiety, your baby may start to wake up again in the middle of the night. Your baby is not hungry and does not need a bottle at this time. Encourage transitional objects to help your baby self-soothe and fall asleep on his own. (See section on Separation Anxiety.)
- If your baby is not already sleeping in his own crib through the night, teach him to do this now. This is your last opportunity to teach him this skill before you take on the

responsibility of caring for him in your own bed until he reaches 2 years old (age when separation anxiety fades). The window of opportunity for sleep training is about to close!

Feeding Baby:

- Your baby should now be eating a variety of foods with some variation in texture (Stage 2-3 if bottled) at three structured meal times now. Give plenty of fresh water from an open cup, sippy cup or cups with soft straws. Baby should take 16-24 oz of breastmilk or formula at this age. If you exceed 24 oz of milk, he is not likely to have much interest in solid foods. Wait until your baby has his 1 year old birthday to move to whole cow milk.
- Continue baby cereal 4-6 Tbsp twice a day. This is an important source of iron and vitamins. Oatmeal is a good choice. You can even use instant oatmeal packets now.
- Continue to introduce solids with mixed textures every 3-4 days. If you are preparing your own baby foods, check out Annabel Karmel's wonderful website and books: <http://www.annabelkarmel.com/us/>
- Some babies still prefer only smooth purees. That is perfectly fine. Be patient. Introduce the solid foods as finger foods (cut up pieces of soft foods, shredded cheese and chicken, ground beef, crackers, cheerios) that are not mixed into the puree. If you have considerable trouble with your baby eating solids and his speech is not progressing as expected, talk with your pediatrician. Your baby may need to be seen by a specialist: <https://www.texaschildrens.org/health/feeding-and-swallowing-disorders>
- Continue to avoid honey, eggs, shellfish/shrimp until after the first birthday.
- Wait until the first birthday to change from breastmilk or formula to whole cow milk.
- Be sure that your infant has an iron rich diet: red meat (beef, lamb) 2-3 times per week, beans, spinach, lentils, iron fortified cereal. Iron is very important for cognitive development. Your baby should be screened for anemia by 12 months of age.
- Remember that your baby is still too young for many foods that are choking hazards such as popcorn, seeds, nuts, and hot dogs. Grapes should be cut into quarters. Anything the shape and size of a grape can completely block your infant's airway. If you have not already taken an infant CPR course, now would be an ideal time to take one: <http://www.redcross.org/take-a-class/cpr>
- Your baby does not need juice. It is ok to give a couple ounces a day of prune or apple juice for constipation relief, but do not give more than 4oz a day and give the juice undiluted. Adding juice to water prolongs the amount of time that your infant's teeth are exposed to sugars and will lead to cavities.

Teething:

- New teeth usually start to erupt around six months, so your baby may have his first teeth already. The first to appear are usually the two bottom front teeth. These are usually

followed by the four upper teeth (central and lateral incisors). The order does not really matter.

- Teething occasionally causes irritability, crying, low grade fever (generally <101), excessive drooling and a desire to chew or bite on something like you or others!
- Rubbing your baby's gums may help ease his discomfort and allowing your baby to chew on a cool teething ring will help.
- Do not use over the counter products marketed for teething. Even the “all natural” varieties may contain belladonna which is a neurotoxin.
- Start to brush his teeth with a child's soft toothbrush and a tiny amount (size of a grain of rice) of children’s fluoride toothpaste after the last feeding of the day before bedtime to prevent cavities. It is also good to brush at least once during daytime hours. There is no need to rinse since the amount of toothpaste is very tiny.

Biting and other socially unacceptable behaviors!

Biting, pinching, screeching, throwing food... these behaviors are completely normal for a nine-month old baby, but can become a problem if we do not teach Baby other methods of socially acceptable behavior. It is not too early to start discipline. Hopefully you began loving discipline already by teaching your baby the schedule for the household when she was just 2-4 months of age. Let’s take some examples that are common for the 9 month old baby:

- **Biting**

It feels really good to a teething baby to bite down on that flesh on your shoulder, kind of like rubbing a sore muscle or eating a really fluffy pancake! Unfortunately, if you do not respond carefully, the behavior may worsen and progress to biting others.

Keep an **empty** PackNPlay set up in a room in your home, but not the central family room (avoid giving your baby an audience during discipline). When Baby bites you or another person, calmly in a firm voice say to your baby as you carry her to the PackNPlay, “Biting hurts.” Put her in the PackNPlay and walk completely out of the room for 1 minute. Do not talk to her during that minute. Take 3 deep breaths and tell yourself that this behavior is completely normal and she did not bite to be malicious. Make sure you are calm and not angry, then walk back in after the minute with a soft smile, pick her up and say, “Lips are for kissing, not biting.” Then give her a kiss.

Do this EVERY time she bites. She may test you to be sure you will react the same way. There is a phenomenon called “extinction burst” that makes a child increase the behavior in response to a discipline before it completely resolves. Be patient.

For particularly oral children and **persistent biters**, consider a squishy teething ring attached to the onesie as a replacement for the urge to bite and to use as an alternative to the biting habit. Watch your infant carefully to determine her triggers for

biting. When you realize she is about to bite, intervene immediately with the teething ring attached to the onesie. If you catch her before she bites the other baby and place the teething ring in her mouth, do not take her to the PackNPlay. Just say, “Lips are for kissing” and give her a kiss; then distract her with a different toy. If you do not catch her in time and she has already bitten the other child, immediately take her to the PackNPlay as described above, and while the minute is passing, go right back and check on the other baby. You will probably be more angry this time because you may feel guilty or ashamed that your baby bit another person’s baby, but calm yourself before you re-enter to pick up your baby after 1 minutes and follow the same recovery routine as usual. Remember that these are opportunities for teaching and learning. Return to play with close observation. Most moms will understand that this is a normal phase and will appreciate that you are taking action to help your baby. If you are in a play group, it’s good for the group to keep the empty PackNPlay available for use by any of the moms who need it.

Sometimes another child may bite back! This may actually curb the behavior, but do not bite your child back to “teach him how it feels.” We must always set a good example for our children and biting him back may reinforce his habit.

- **Pinching, hitting**

Baby is exploring what types of things he can do with his hands to get a reaction from you. If you react with strong emotion or a loud voice when he hits or pinches, he actually is rewarded and will continue the behavior even if your reaction was screaming or getting angry! Hitting back is even worse... now it’s a game of who can hit the hardest! Set a good example for your baby; do not buy into the idea that you will “teach him how it feels.” When your baby pinches or hits, follow the same guidelines as for biting. “Hitting/ pinching hurts” said in a firm calm voice as you place him in the PackNPlay. Walk away for a minute, calm yourself and then return. “Hands are for gentle touch, not hitting/pinching.” Then take his little hand and gently use his hand to stroke your cheek and repeat, “Gentle touch.” He will get the idea as long as you do not use too much emotion with your responses.

- **Screeching**

This is a particularly annoying behavior because it almost always happens when you are in a quiet public setting with your baby without a place for a quick “time-out.” In response to the screech, everyone around turns to look at your baby (some smiling, some frowning), giving all the negative attention Baby ever hoped to receive! It is also hard to predict this behavior. It is your baby’s method of getting your attention. Do your best to not react strongly to the screeching. Instead give him a teething ring or sippy cup to distract him and say to him, “Mama, Dada” while pointing out those people. It’s probably easier to go to restaurants that are not too quiet when you have a baby or young toddler.

- **Throwing Food**

Sometimes throwing food means, “I’m not hungry anymore” or “I don’t want anymore.” If your baby has already eaten a substantial amount, remove the tray from the high chair, clean him up and **leave him buckled** in the chair. Teach him the sign for “all done.” Then say, “are you all done?” while you make the sign. Take him out and move on to the next activity. Keep practicing this routine at meal times if he tries to throw food.

If he has not eaten very much at all, remove the tray from your baby’s high chair and feed him with a spoon directly without giving him access to the food for throwing. Each time you begin a meal time, first start with the food on the tray in front of him. He will learn that if he wants to have opportunity to feed himself (as most 9 month old babies prefer), then he cannot throw the food. Babies have particularly poor short term memory at this age; you may need to practice this over and over for him to learn.

Separation Anxiety:

Up to this point, your baby has most likely accepted all people with the exception of strangers. She has now reached an important social development milestone termed “separation anxiety.” She knows who her very closest caregivers are and will cling to those caregivers. Many babies cling to one parent more than the other parent. This is normal development. As a pediatrician, I become concerned about developmental problems when an infant does not show this preference for the primary caregiver by 12 months of age. Separation anxiety will peak around 15-18 months of age then gradually fade after the 2 year old birthday. Remember to enjoy this time because babies grow up very fast into teens who sometimes do not want to spend time with their parent. Look at this time as an opportunity rather than a burden.

Separation anxiety can sometimes cause a baby who has slept very well at night to awaken again at night time and cry out. If this happens, wait only 2 minutes to see if the crying stops on its own. If not, go in quickly and tell your infant “Shh, it’s bedtime,” pat the tummy or lay her back down in the crib if she is standing, then walk directly back out of the room. You may need to do the sleep intervals again if the crying persists. See the sleep training section in “[My Two Month Old and Me](#).” Encourage your child to adopt a transitional object such as a small “lovie” to help soothe herself back to sleep. Separation anxiety usually peaks around 15- 18 months of life and resolves during the latter half of the second year. If your baby is already showing separation anxiety and you have not trained her to sleep in her own crib before now, be prepared to care for her in your own room until she is about 2 years of age. It is not fair to an infant to do sleep training for the very first time at this age.

Safety Tips:

Baby Walkers, contrary to their name, do not help your child learn to walk earlier. They do help strengthen the muscles in the lower legs; however, they do not strengthen the muscles of the upper legs or hips which are used more for walking. In addition, they are a serious safety hazard as they can easily tip over if your child bumps into an obstacle such as a toy or throw rug. Use an “exersaucer” without wheels instead, if you like, but really crawling around on the floor is best for development and best for the immune system!

Use a Rear-Facing Car Seat in the back seat until your baby is two years old. You may need to use a convertible car seat if your baby has reached the height restriction on the infant car seat (usually 29-30 inches), but keep the convertible car seat facing backward until 2 years of age if possible.

Do not use Q-Tips inside Baby’s ear canals. They only push the wax deeper and could injure the delicate ear causing bleeding or even hearing damage. Instead, clean Baby’s ears by using a soapy fingertip directly in the ear space, then rinse with warm fresh water, preferably from an hand-held sprayer attached to the shower head.

Baby Proof your home. Here is a reminder checklist of things to do:

- Safety-lock cabinet doors. Keep medications out of reach.
- Keep dishwash detergent and clothes detergent pods out of reach.
- Secure furniture such as dressers with drawers, bookshelves, TVs to walls.
- Post the Poison Control #1-800-222-1222 on the refrigerator and phone contacts.
- Avoid table cloths, baby will pull up on them and make things fall down.
- Cut loops or tie up curtain cords to avoid strangulation.
- Never leave an empty cooler lid open- suffocation hazard!
- Set a reminder app on phone to check for baby upon arrival in car.
- Cover the sharp edges of coffee tables and move breakables out of reach.
- Prevent access to stairs with baby gates.
- Put plastic plug covers in outlets.
- Put safety lock on toilet seat cover.
- Never leave a mop bucket or container of water around for even a short time.
- Put self-locking gate around swimming pool.
- Secure “doggy doors” to prevent Baby from crawling outside.
- Do not leave "kiddy pools" filled.
- Remove coins and toys with small parts from floor.
- Lower crib mattress (if not already lowered).
- Attach a hand held sprayer to your shower head and leave the drain on the baby bath-tub open. Instead of sitting baby in a pool of bath water, wash with the flowing bath water.

"Don't worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you."

— Robert Fulghum, author