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Early Childhood Development After Prematurity

Checked against current guidelines by the Juniper Foundation editorial team. Not yet reviewed by a clinician.

Babies born early often reach milestones on their own timeline. This sheet explains corrected age, the follow-up care many babies receive, and simple ways to support your child's development.

Corrected age

Corrected age is your baby's age counted from their due date instead of their birth date. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) explains how to work it out:

1. Subtract the weeks of pregnancy at birth from 40 to find how many weeks early your baby was born.
2. Subtract that number from your baby's age in weeks since birth.

For example, a baby born at 32 weeks was 8 weeks early. At 16 weeks old, their corrected age is 8 weeks. The AAP says that during the first 2 years, corrected age gives a better idea of when to expect common milestones.

Follow-up care many babies receive

- Regular checkups with your pediatrician
- Visits to a NICU follow-up or developmental clinic, if recommended
- Hearing and eye checks, as your baby’s team recommends
- Therapy, such as physical, occupational, or speech therapy, if your child's team recommends it

The AAP notes that therapy visits often become less frequent as a baby gets healthier and builds skills.

Early intervention

In the United States, every state and territory has an early intervention program for babies and toddlers younger than 3 who have, or may have, developmental delays. The CDC says you do not need a doctor’s referral or a diagnosis to call your local program and ask for a free evaluation. Your pediatrician or NICU team can also help. For children 3 and older, contact your local public school.

Track milestones

The CDC's free **Milestone Tracker** app and checklists cover ages 2 months through 5 years. For a baby born early, ask your pediatrician whether to use corrected age when you check milestones.

Tell your child's doctor right away if:

- Your child loses a skill they used to have
- Your child does not respond to sounds or does not seem to see well
- Your child's body seems very stiff or very floppy
- You have any worry at all about how your child moves, plays, communicates, or eats

Everyday ways to support development

- Talk, sing, and read to your baby every day
- Respond to your baby's sounds, faces, and cries
- Give supervised tummy time while your baby is awake
- Offer simple toys and time on the floor to move and explore
- Keep well-child visits and vaccines on schedule
- Take care of yourself. Parent wellbeing matters to children too.

My notes

- Corrected age today: _____
- Next appointments: _____
- Questions for the doctor: _____

Where to learn more

- Corrected versus chronological age

- Early intervention programs
- Developmental screening
- CDC: Learn the Signs. Act Early., cdc.gov/act-early
- HealthyChildren.org (AAP): Corrected age for preemies, healthychildren.org

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