

# BabySense 4-6 Months

by Cristy Balcells, RN, MSN

Perhaps you've noticed that your sleepy baby has suddenly woken up and become a social butterfly! Sometime between 3-4 months, babies become very aware of the environment around them. They begin to realize for the first time – "I can make things happen!" Four to six months is a magic beginning filled with curiosity and discovery –perhaps no other time in your child's life will be so filled with change and growth than those first six months.

Your 4-6 month old baby now smiles freely, and can show other feelings like surprise, anger or frustration. Baby learns first that his hands exist, and then discovers that they are his to move and control. Now he can pick things up, explore faces and hair with his fingers, bang, pat, shake a rattle on purpose, bring things to his mouth, change a toy from hand to hand, and grab his feet! Encourage his new curiosity by offering varieties of objects to explore. A few household items and a medium size basket are great investments that your baby will enjoy playing with over the next year. Inexpensive wooden spoons, metal measuring spoons, plastic measuring cup sets, large clothespins, plastic shower curtain rings, small pots and pans with lids, and assorted Tupperware type containers keep your baby busy while teaching him how things work. As your baby learns to "dump and drop" plastic shower curtain rings into a container, your little one is learning about cause and effect, sounds, shapes, etc. Remember, children, especially babies, learn through play!

Now may also be the time to help your four-six month old adapt to a routine if you don't have one already. While flexibility is key with growing children, consistency is equally important. Predictability helps your baby learn communication skills – knowing what usually comes next helps your little one begin to understand how she fits into the family. But wait! Many parents jump ahead and put their baby on a schedule without first trying to discover their baby's natural patterns. Is your baby a night owl? Does she fight daytime naps but sleep better at night? Is she most hungry in the afternoon or evening? Try this first – keep a daily log for at least three days of everything your baby does. What time did she wake up? Eat? Play? For how long? When did she first show signs of sleepiness (red eyes, kicking with eyes shut)? When did she actually take a nap? After keeping a diary of your baby's natural cycles for a few days, you can pick out the feeding, sleep and play times that work best for *your baby*. Again, routine and predictability is more important than time. So if your baby sleeps one morning until 8 a.m., when she usually rises at 6 a.m., don't worry, but do try to follow your usual pattern of meals, play time, etc.

Sleepy newborn days are gone, and in their place you may find a baby who loves to play and demands your attention! Put everything aside and take time to get down on the floor and sing, tickle and laugh with your baby. At times you may feel overwhelmed by cuteness – don't worry, it's a normal symptom of Mommy disease!