

Dr Jenny Gregor
Neonatologist & Paediatrician
Suite 3, Ground Floor
271 Clayton Rd
CLAYTON VIC 3168
Ph: 1300 657 257
Fax: 03 8526 0302
www.carepaediatrics.com.au



Developmental delay

Development is the process by which your child acquires skills in the areas of language, socialization and motor abilities (sitting and walking). The different areas of development are:

- Gross motor: how we move (rolling, sitting, walking)
- Fine motor: how we can manipulate and use small objects with our hands (feeding ourselves, dressing)
- Speech and language: words and sentences and understanding
- Social and emotional development: how we relate to family and strangers
- Cognitive/intellectual: how we think and learn (counting, naming colours)

A baby will start to learn to acquire these skills from a very early age since birth and will build these skills into more complex abilities as your child gets older. There are many things that a child is learning to do particularly as an infant, toddler and young child. There is a large range as to when different children will learn different skills. However it is important to recognize when a child is delayed compared to the average child with each area of development. Regardless of the rate of developmental most children will continue to improve on their skills.

Development can be divided into four main areas. These are gross motor (rolling, sitting, walking), fine motor (grasping objects, feeding yourself), language (making a range of sounds through to saying individual words and sentences) and socialization (smiling and how a child gets along with other children and adults). Babies normally develop from the head down to the toes. So the first thing they will generally do is to smile, then they will learn to lift their heads up when they are lying on their tummies to being able to roll then sit. Therefore more simple skills will develop before more difficult ones. Most babies and toddlers will achieve certain skills with a certain age range. For example most children will walk between the ages of 9 and 18 months. Most children can say at least 10 words by the time they are 18 months old. If they take longer than this then this may indicate a problem with development.

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Red Flags

12 months

- A child cannot sit without support
- A child cannot distinguish strangers from family
- No single words

2 years

- Unable to walk well
- Cannot use spoon
- Cannot scribble

If your child is having difficulty with some or all of these developmental stages then please make an appointment to see me. If your child has lost skills that they previously had this is potentially more concerning.

Temporary developmental delay can be caused by a number of factors. Premature babies may be delayed in one or more areas due to being born early and most will eventually catch up. When we assess a premature baby's developmental we use their corrected age which is the age they would have been had they been born at term (ie if your baby was 12 weeks premature and it is 16 weeks since their birth then your baby is 4 weeks corrected and may not be smiling yet). Most babies smile around 6 to 8 weeks old. Physical illness, prolonged time in hospital, family stress and problems with bonding with your child and lack of opportunity can also impact on development.

Causes of persistent developmental delay include problems with a child's muscles (cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophies), problems with a child's vision or hearing, epilepsy (fits) or developmental/behavioural problems (autism spectrum disorder, ASD, attention deficit disorder, ADD/ADHD). Over half of all causes of developmental delay are caused by factors prior to birth. Some can be genetic or chromosomal (a problem with the building blocks that cause your child to look the way that they do), caused by infections during pregnancy. Some problems that occur around the time of birth can have an impact on the baby's development. A lack of oxygen or blood flow to the baby's brain leading up to, around the time or just after birth can impact on development. Infections, particularly of the

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brain (ie meningitis) and trauma (car accidents, head injuries) can also cause developmental delay.

When I see your child I will do an assessment of their developmental stage and take a comprehensive birth, family and medical history. I may also need to gather information from your child's childcare worker or kinder/school teacher. I will then examine them and determine if there are any medical reasons for their developmental delay. Following this we may arrange some investigations that may include blood and urine tests or imaging of your child's brain. We may also arrange testing of your child's hearing and vision. However, in many cases of developmental delay we cannot find a cause.

I will also involve a number of other specialist clinicians in the initial assessment and ongoing management of your child. This may include a physiotherapist, an occupational therapist, a child psychologist, and a speech pathologist.

It is important to remember that children with problems in development will usually acquire the skills they need to it just make take a little longer and require additional specialized help. They will have their own particular strengths as well as their weaknesses and it is very important to provide love, support and encouragement to enable such children to reach their full potential. An early intervention program including a speech pathologist, an occupational therapist and a physiotherapist will assist in developing your child's skills. A social worker may also be involved in the care of your family as having a child with these issues can have a significant impact on the family particularly the parental relationship and the needs of sisters and brothers. Your child can also become very frustrated where they have problems communicating their needs to others or keeping up with other children in their age group.

If your child is diagnosed with developmental delay in one or more areas of development there are many community services available to assist. If a diagnosis is made then I will assist in ensuring your child receives the best possible care and involve all the clinicians that are necessary to maximize your child's potential. It will also be important to ensure that you are aware of all the community and financial resources that are available to your child and your family.