

Project NATIVE

Native Americans Teaming in Visual Empowerment

Protecting Your Baby's Vision - Birth to Two Years

Vision Series Part 4 - Babies are not born with all the visual abilities needed in life. What part of vision is learned? Babies learn to focus their eyes, move them accurately, and use them as a team. They learn how to use the visual signals eyes send to the brain. Healthy eyes/good vision impact how infants learn to see; equally, eye/vision problems may cause developmental delays making it important to **plan an eye exam for your baby**.

Part of Project NATIVE's mission is to raise awareness of the needs and challenges of the visually impaired. Project NATIVE offers free workshops for Native Americans with low vision as well as presentations to businesses about customer service and accessibility for low vision customers. If you or a family member is interested in these services, please contact us at (918) 456-5581. Project NATIVE is funded by the Administration for Native Americans, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Grant #90NA8147-01-00.

What Parents Can Do for Their Baby's Eye Health

- At about 6 months, parents can schedule a comprehensive baby vision assessment even if no problems are apparent.
- Parents can watch for signs of eye and vision problems and seek professional advice to help their child if they note a problem.
- Parents can engage in age-appropriate activities to help with natural vision development.



Vision Development & How Parents Can Help with Development

Children make significant improvement in their eye/vision development in the first few months of life. Parents are advised to watch these milestones. As with other developmental milestones, not every child is the same.

Birth to 4 Months (Development Milestones)

- Baby's primary focus is on objects 8 to 10 inches from their face or the distance to their parent's face. Babies may look intently at highly contrasted images but they cannot tell the difference between two images or move their eyes between the images.
- Baby's eyes start working together as vision rapidly improves; eye-hand coordination begins with tracking moving objects with their eyes and reaching for objects. By 8 weeks, babies start to focus on close faces.
- Baby's eyes are not well coordinated and may appear to wander or cross – this is usually normal. However, if an eye seems to turn in or out constantly, an early vision evaluation is needed.
- Normally babies begin to follow moving objects with their eyes and reach for things at 3 months.

Birth to 4 Months (How Parents Can Help with Development)

- Use a nightlight or dim lamp in the baby's room.
- Change crib position frequently and baby's position in it.
- Keep reach-and-touch toys within baby's focus, 8-12".
- Talk to your baby as you walk around the room.
- Alternate right and left sides with each feeding.



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Babies 5 to 8 Months (Development Milestones)

- Control of eye movements and eye-body coordination skills continue to improve.
- Judging whether an object is near or far from other objects is not present at birth but now develops (3D).
- An infant can see color by 5 months; however, it is not as sensitive as the color vision of an adult.
- At about 8 months most babies start crawling which helps develop eye-hand-foot-body coordination. Early walkers may not learn to use their eyes together as well as crawlers.

Babies 5 to 8 Months (How Parents Can Help with Development)

- Hang mobile-type objects across the crib for grabbing and pulling.
- Give baby plenty of time to play and explore on the floor – also play patty cake and other movement/word games.
- Provide plastic or wooden blocks babies can hold in their hands.



Babies 9 to 12 Months (Development Milestones)

- At 9 months babies begin pulling themselves up and by 10 months a baby is able to grasp objects with thumb and forefinger.
- By 12 months most babies are crawling and trying to walk. Parents should encourage crawling rather than early walking to help the child develop better eye-hand coordination.
- Babies can now judge distances fairly well and throw things with precision.

Babies 9 to 12 Months (How Parents Can Help with Development)

- Play hide and seek games to develop visual memory.
- Name objects when talking so baby can word associate.
- Encourage crawling and creeping.



Babies 1 to 2 Years Old (Development Milestones)

- Eye-hand coordination and depth perception are well developed; they recognize familiar objects/pictures and can scribble.
- Children are highly interested in exploring their environment, looking and listening.

Babies 1 to 2 Years Old (How Parents Can Help with Development)

- Rolling a ball helps the child track objects with the eyes - blocks/balls of all shapes/sizes can boost fine motor skills and small muscle development.
- Read/tell stories to stimulate the ability to visualize; paving the way for future reading.

Signs of Eye and Vision Problems in Babies

If your baby isn't meeting these milestones or if your baby exhibits any of the following signs they need immediate attention by your pediatrician or optometrist: excessive tearing, red/encrusted lids, constant eye turning, extreme sensitivity to light or appearance of white pupil.

[Information contained in this fact sheet is provided by the American Optometric Association, www.aoa.org.]

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