



## Fetal Growth and Development

# 12-24 WEEKS

The age of your baby may be referred to in trimesters, weeks, of gestation, or “months”. The date of conception is approximately 2 weeks after the last menstrual period. The normal length of pregnancy is 40 weeks, 9 calendar months (280 days) or 10 lunar months.

### FIRST TRIMESTER

**Month 1:** At the end of 4 weeks, your baby, called an embryo, reaches 1/2 inch in length. The heart, brain, lungs, eyes and ears have begun to form. The placenta and umbilical cord are developing and the baby is already being protected in a sac of liquid called amniotic fluid.

**Month 2:** At the end of eight weeks, arms, legs, fingers and toes are beginning to form. The embryo is beginning to look more human. Facial features are more pronounced. External sex organs are present, but it is difficult to distinguish between male and female. The embryo is about one inch long now.

**Month 3:** At the end of 12 weeks your baby is called a fetus, is about three inches long and weighs 1 ounce. The face is well developed. The arms, legs, fingers and toes are also fully developed and able to move, but mother cannot feel this movement yet.

### SECOND TRIMESTER

**MONTH 4:** At the end of 16 weeks, your baby is about 8 1/2 inches long and weighs 6 ounces. The essential body systems are complete now, and most of the remaining changes involve growth. Your baby’s teeth, eyebrows and eyelashes appear. The sex of the baby is easily distinguished. During this time, you may feel the first movements of your baby.

**MONTH 5:** At the end of 20 weeks, your baby is about 12 inches long and weighs about 1 pound. Hair may appear on the head. Although your baby is still quite thin, she is beginning to deposit fat under her skin. You can easily feel your baby’s movement.

**MONTH 6:** At the end of 24 weeks, your baby is 14 inches long and weighs about 2 pounds. Vernix caseosa, a creamy coating that protect your baby from its watery environment appears. The eyes can open and your baby can hear.

# Fetal Growth and Development 12-24 WEEKS cont.

## THIRD TRIMESTER

**MONTH 7:** At the end of 28 weeks, your baby is 16 inches long and weighs 3 pounds. Fine downy hair, called lanugo, grows all over the baby and helps protect her from the amniotic fluid.

**MONTH 8:** At the end of 32 weeks, he is 18 inches long and weighs 5 or more pounds. His bones and nails are hardening and there is more fat under his skin, making wrinkles disappear. During the last 2 months, your baby will gain about an ounce per day.

**MONTH 9:** At the end of 36 weeks, most babies weigh 6-8 pounds and are 19-21 inches long. The lanugo hair and vernix have started to disappear. The remaining time is spent gaining weight and getting prepared for birth. The lungs and other body parts are usually developed enough to live outside your body with minimal or no medical support.

**Feeling Movement** - Fetal movement is usually felt between 16 and 20 weeks of pregnancy. The first movement is often described as a faint fluttery feeling felt between your pubic bone and navel. This is called “quickening.” If you feel that fluttery feeling one day, and not again for several days, do not be alarmed. Because your baby is suspended in a sea of amniotic fluid, you may not be able to feel every movement. As your baby increases in size, the movement will be easier to feel.

Several things can affect your baby’s activity level. These include things such as sound, physical stimulus, position, your blood sugar level, and your and your baby’s sleep-wake cycle. Fetal activity is reassuring. Notify your provider if you have noticed your baby’s activity has decreased from its previous pattern.

**FHT’S** - Fetal heart tones (FHT’s) refer to the baby’s heartbeat. Your caregiver will be able to hear them with a special stethoscope about 16-20 weeks, maybe sooner with the Doppler. FHT’s are checked at each prenatal visit.

**AFP** - An alpha-fetoprotein (AFP) test, is an optional blood test performed between the 15th and 20th week of pregnancy. This test screens for neural tube defects. Neural tube defects are abnormalities in the brain and spinal cord of the fetus. The chance of producing a child with such a defect is 1-2 for every thousand live births. The risk is increased in those who have previously had a baby with the same problem.

Abnormal levels of AFP occur in about 50 of every 1,000 women tested. Only 1 or 2 of those 50 actually have a neural tube defect. Various normal fetal conditions can cause elevated AFP levels. Second AFP tests are normal in about half of those who are retested. Further evaluation is needed if the second test is abnormal. Although very unlikely, it is possible to have a normal AFP test and still have a baby with a neural tube defect. As with all prenatal tests, a normal test does not guarantee a normal baby at birth.

**Genetic Counseling** - “Will my baby be normal?” That’s the question all parents ask. Knowing the family history of both you and your baby’s father will allow us to anticipate certain problems that can be minimized with proper care. Today, we have a better chance of diagnosing certain genetically transmitted diseases thanks to medical technology. A variety of specialized tests may be required depending on your family’s medical history. Your provider may also refer you for genetic counseling or testing if you are age 35 or over.