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NEWBORN REFLEXES

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Newborn Reflexes

Your baby’s newborn reflexes are their involuntary reactions to certain stimulation. Your baby was born with these reflexes to help them survive. Your baby’s pediatrician will monitor your baby’s reflexes to make sure your baby is developing properly. Many of your newborn’s reflexes will disappear within their first few months of life.

Contents

↓

Overview

Additional Common Questions

Overview

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What are newborn reflexes?

Newborn reflexes are your baby's involuntary muscle responses to stimulation. Certain actions or sensations produce specific muscle reactions. That means your baby isn't controlling the responses. They're happening automatically without your baby trying. Newborn reflexes are one of the normal [newborn behaviors](#) your baby should develop.

Your newborn has limited control over their body, but they're born with an innate set of skills to help them survive. Many of the normal reflexes of newborns are present before they're born. The responses originate in your baby's [brainstem](#) and are linked to early development.

Your baby's healthcare team uses newborn reflexes to assess your baby's health. The presence and strength of your newborn's reflexes are important signs of your baby's [nervous system](#) development and function.

What are the two oral reflexes found in newborn babies?

The oral reflexes include rooting and sucking:

- **Rooting reflex:** The rooting reflex, or root reflex, is a basic survival instinct. It helps your

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baby find and latch onto a nipple to feed.

When you lightly stroke your baby's cheek or mouth, they should turn their head toward your hand. They should open their mouth and start to make sucking movements.

- **Sucking reflex:** The sucking reflex is another survival instinct. When you touch your baby's mouth or insert your nipple into their mouth to [breastfeed](#) (chestfeed), they should begin sucking. Even though this is a natural reflex, it's not easy. Your newborn has to figure out how to suck while breathing and swallowing at the same time.

What are the 5 other newborn reflexes?

Your newborn should develop several other reflexes as well.

Moro reflex

The newborn startle reflex, or Moro reflex, is a protective response to a sudden movement or a loud noise. When your baby's head falls backward or an abrupt sound startles them, they should extend their arms and legs. Their arms should reach out with their palms facing up and their thumbs sticking out. Your baby may also cry loudly. When you support their head again, they should quickly bring their arms together and

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relax. The startle reflex can look like [infantile spasms](#), but they're different. Infantile spasms are a type of seizure.

Tonic neck reflex

The tonic neck reflex, or fencing posture, should occur when your baby's lying on their back. When you turn your baby's head to one side, their arm on that side should straighten with their hand partially open. Their opposite arm should bend and flex, with their fist tightly clenched. Another name for this position is the fencer's posture because it looks like a fencer's stance.

Stepping reflex

The stepping reflex may help your newborn instinctively "crawl" to your breast immediately following [delivery](#) when they're lying on your chest. Your baby may appear to take steps when their feet touch a flat surface. If you hold your baby upright and let their soles touch the surface, they should place one foot in front of the other in a "walking" motion.

Babinski reflex

The Babinski reflex in your newborn is a reaction in their foot. When you stroke the bottom of your baby's foot from their heel to their toes, their big toe should move upward. The rest of their toes should fan out. A [neurologist](#) named Joseph

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should fall out. A [neurologist](#) named Joseph

Babinski discovered this reflex in 1896. Another name for this reflex is the Babinski sign.

Grasping reflex

There are two grasping reflexes — one in your baby's hand and one in their foot:

- **Palmar grasp:** When you stroke the palm of your baby's hand, they should immediately grab your finger and hold on tight. If you try to remove your finger, they may grip you tighter.
- **Plantar grasp:** The Babinski reflex should eventually go away and be replaced with the plantar grasp, which lasts through adulthood. When you place a finger below your baby's toes, they should curl their toes around it.

When do newborn reflexes disappear?

Most newborn reflexes go away within four to six months of age. As your baby's [brain](#) matures, their central nervous system replaces the involuntary newborn reflexes with voluntary movements. The Moro and stepping reflexes should disappear by the age of 2 months, while the grasping and tonic neck reflexes may take a little longer. But all newborn reflexes should disappear by your baby's first birthday.

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Do all newborn reflexes disappear?

Some newborn reflexes disappear within weeks or months of birth. But some reflexes remain through adulthood. Reflexes that last to adulthood include:

- **Blink reflex:** You blink your eyes when you see a bright light.
- **Sneeze reflex:** You sneeze when your nasal passages are irritated.
- **Yawn reflex:** You yawn when your body needs more oxygen.
- **Cough reflex:** You [cough](#) when the back of your airway is stimulated.
- **Gag reflex:** You gag when your throat or the back of your mouth is stimulated.

Additional Common Questions

What is a hyperactive gag reflex in a newborn?

The gag reflex helps prevent choking. When food, utensils, fingers or toys touch the back of your baby's mouth, their gag reflex may be triggered. Gagging is common when your baby is starting to

eat solid foods. Most babies will gag less as they wean and get used to eating solids.

However, some babies are more sensitive to their gag reflex. They gag more easily and more often.

Causes of a hyperactive gag reflex in newborns may include:

- Weaning too early and/or not ready for solid foods.
- Born [prematurely](#).
- [Developmental delays](#) or neurological conditions.
- Unable to sit well without support.
- [Tongue-tie \(ankyloglossia\)](#).
- [Acid reflux](#).
- Difficulty feeding.

If your baby has a hypersensitive gag reflex, reach out to their [pediatrician](#). They may refer you to a feeding specialist.

How do I check the Moro reflex in my newborn?

To check your baby's Moro reflex, place your baby in a seated stance or lying face-up on a soft, padded surface. Gently lift your baby's head and then quickly release it, allowing it to fall backward for a second, but quickly support it again.

If your baby has a normal Moro reflex, they'll have a startled look on their face. They'll extend their arms sideways with their palms up and their thumbs flexed. Your baby may also cry. When you support your baby's head again, they'll bring their arms back into their body, flex their elbows and relax.

Why might newborns possess an imitation reflex?

In the past, researchers believed newborn babies could imitate adults with a so-called imitation reflex. However, newer studies have shown there's no evidence to prove the imitation reflex exists. In the newborn stage, babies' movements and actions are random. Anything that may look like an imitation is just a reflexive response to the world around them. It's not a deliberate imitation.

A note from Cleveland Clinic

Your baby is born with a natural set of reflexes that help them survive their first few weeks and months of life. Your baby's pediatrician will test their reflexes to make sure they're present and strong. As your baby gets older, they should drop some of these reflexes as they develop new skills and independence. However, keep in mind that every baby is different. When your baby develops and loses these reflexes is unique to them. Speak with your child's provider if you have any

concerns about your baby's development.



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