



The Developmental Sequence of Rolling

Reference: Communication Skill Builders



Rolling is often your baby's first form of independent movement. At first, your baby doesn't know about rolling. The first roll, or turnover, happens by accident. But soon, your baby learns that by moving in a certain way, something happens that makes it easier to see, feel, or reach new things.

With practice, your baby develops controlled coordination and is able to roll on purpose. The result is an early form of locomotion—now your baby has the ability to move from one location to another. Locomotion is a very important activity, and it quickly makes your baby want to explore and learn more about the world.

Rolling front to back

- Before rolling from a tummy lying position, your baby must be able to lift the head and turn it from side to side. Your baby also needs the strength to lift the head and upper back while beginning to push up onto the forearms.
- First, the baby begins to shift weight onto one forearm while reaching out with the other hand. At the same time, the baby turns the head from side to side. This develops the back muscles, which help to lift the baby higher off the surface. At this point, your baby may roll over accidentally.
- Next, the baby learns to push up with one arm, turn the head toward the pushing arm, tuck the other arm under, and turn the upper body over. The neck muscles slow the roll so that the head does not hit hard. At first, the lower body just falls over, so that the body is in proper alignment. As strength and control of head, shoulder girdle, trunk, and hips increase, the roll becomes more intentional, smooth, and coordinated.
- Now the baby begins to use arm, trunk, and leg muscles to control the speed of the turnover. Your baby's world is full of interesting things: by reaching out and turning over to play, your baby practices and perfects this tummy-to-back roll.



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Rolling back to front

- Your baby must be able to turn the head fully from side to side. The muscles in the neck and upper body become stronger as your baby spends time playing with knees and feet in a back lying position. Your baby does not need to be strong enough to lift just the head off the floor before rolling from back to front, but, to begin the roll, your baby must have enough muscular control to lift and turn the neck and upper body.
- Before rolling, the baby must be able to bring the hands to the center of the body. Reaching out and to the side is very important because your baby needs to practice moving and controlling the body as weight shifts from side to side. To begin the roll, the baby needs to be able just to reach across the body—not twist the whole upper body. While reaching across the body, the baby lifts and turns the head to begin the roll. The first rolls will be to a sidelying position.
- Before rolling completely over, your baby must be able to straighten the hips. Some babies push off with their legs to begin and complete the roll.
- Soon your baby will use rolling to get around the room. To do that, the baby needs control of the head and trunk and must be able to reach forward with the arms or push off with the legs. At the same time, your baby will be practicing many other activities which will increase control, strength, and speed of rolling.



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Does rolling help other areas of development?

Yes. A few of these are:

- Controlled horizontal movements against gravity
- Learning to use the lower body to control the upper body
- Hearing stimulation
- Visual and optical stimulation
- Orientation away from and back to midline in horizontal planes
- Strength and flexibility throughout the spine, arms, and legs
- Feeling deep pressure throughout the trunk, which helps the baby learn about the "center of control"
- Learning to move faster and slower in a controlled way, and finding the most efficient ways to use the muscles for locomotion.

Summary

Rolling helps your baby learn about balance and tells the baby about its center of gravity and how to use it. Rolling develops strength and control and helps babies learn about how their bodies move in space and how the different parts of the body work together. And at the same time, your baby is exploring and learning about a world that gets bigger with every roll.