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Leaping Through the First 20 Months

The Wonder Weeks Predicts, Age-Related Leaps in Mental Development of Infants

- The Leaps Explained -

New York, NY – It's not your imagination– all babies go through a difficult period around the same age. Research has shown that babies make 10 major, predictable, age-linked changes – or leaps – during their first 20 months of their lives. During this time, they will learn more than in any other time. With each leap comes a drastic change in your baby's mental development, which affects not only his mood, but also his health, intelligence, sleeping patterns and the “three C's” (crying, clinging and crankiness).

Babies cry during a leap because they've reached a radical new step in their mental development. That is good: it gives them the opportunity to learn new things. The “difficult” behavior is actually a signal that great progress is underway.

Like the physical growth spurts that a child makes, the mental development of children is also made with leaps. Neurological research has shown that such leaps are accompanied by changes in the brain. *The Wonder Weeks*, by Dutch authors Hetty van de Rijt and Frans Plooij, describes in easy to understand terms the incredible developmental changes that all babies go through during their first 20 months of life.

With each leap, a child will enter a new world, making new observations that he previously was unable to notice. Below is a brief glimpse into the “new” world a baby experiences with each leap.

@5 Weeks (Leap of “Changing Sensations”): A Grow & A Tear

Everything indicates that during this leap your baby is experiencing a rapid maturation of metabolism, internal organs and senses. S/he is clearly more interested in the world around him and is now better able to look at things beyond the range of 20-to-30 cm. As a parent you notice that your baby suddenly is responding more to you and others. Interesting note: your baby produces, for the first time or much more frequently than before, tears while crying.

Did you know... Just before your baby makes this leap, there is a dramatic increase in the circumference of his/her head. The glucose metabolism in his brain also changes. So a lot is happening in his little brain. You can really call this a major leap!

@8 Weeks (Leap of “Patterns”): The World is not a “Soup” Anymore

After having made this leap, the baby doesn't experience the world as a single, undividable entity anymore (like a bowl of soup, where everything blends together) and begins to differentiate regular patterns. For example: he discovers his hands. He looks surprised and turns them around.

Many of the baby's automatic reflexes disappear, and he begins to do things purposefully. All the movements your baby makes still look very stiff to the outside world, as if he was a Pinocchio, a puppet on a string.

Note: Most babies make this leap 8 weeks after the due date. However, some babies make the leap one week sooner, some one week later.

@12 Weeks (Leap of "Smooth Transitions"): The Secret of Playing "Airplane"

During the first year, your baby will learn things that adults find so natural and simple that they no longer notice them. But for babies, they are the most complex things they can handle and therefore their "peak experiences." The perception and control of "patterns" is followed by the ability to perceive "smooth transitions." That enables the baby to move less stiff and robotic. That new ability is also reflected in the way he plays with his voice, and is the reason that babies love to play "airplane," with them in your hands as they "fly" across the room, making steep dives and rising again.

Note: Most babies make this leap 12 weeks after the due date. However, some babies make the leap one week sooner, some one week later.

@19 Weeks (Leap of "Events"): "Itsy Bitsy Spider..."

The perceptual world your baby enters after the next leap is the world of "events." Until your baby has made this leap, he can only perceive smooth transitions. After he has made this leap, he is able to perceive a short, familiar series of "smooth transitions" with all his senses – seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting – and also when it comes to interactions with those around him. Examples include the perception of a bouncing ball, or grasping something with a hand. The baby will enjoy the classic nursery rhymes with gestures, such as "Itsy Bitsy Spider..."

Tip: If your baby is "fussy," be sure to observe if he is mastering new skills already, or attempting to do so.

Note: Most babies make this leap 19 weeks after the due date. However, some babies make the leap one week sooner, some one week later.

@26 Weeks (Leap of "Relationships"): In, On, Behind, and For How Long?

After this leap, your baby will start to perceive relationships, including distance, between the things that make up his world. Suddenly, his world is a very, very big place and he is a very small part. It also includes simple things like the distance or the juxtaposition between things and the placement of things in relation to each other: something can be inside, outside, on top of, next to, underneath or in between something else, and your baby will play with these notions. Maybe your baby suddenly cries if you go a little further from him. This is very normal. Your baby now understands that the distance between you and him increases!

Note: Most babies make this leap 26 weeks after the due date. However, some babies make the leap one week sooner, some one week later.

@37 Weeks (Leap of "Categories"): See, Compare and Classify

Now follows the world of "categories." Now your baby learns that a large dog is not a horse. Or, that a checkered cat is not a cow. You will notice your baby investigating everything in his path and studying every detail as he starts to categorize things around him. That takes a lot to consider and compare, and your baby is in love with you and everything in his ever widening world.

Note: Most babies make this leap 37 weeks after the due date. However, some babies make the leap one week sooner, some one week later

@46 Weeks (Leap of “Sequences”): Why the Cereal Flies Through the Air!

In the world of “sequences” your baby learns to recognize and manage the flow of events and relationships over time. Eating cereal with a spoon, for example, means: grab the spoon, put the spoon into the bowl, scoop some cereal onto the spoon, bring the spoon to your head and put it in your mouth (and not in your eye). Your baby starts to link actions together to reach a “goal,” such as feeding himself, but may miss a component or two in the beginning. At this stage, your baby likes to feel needed and will want to help.

Note: Most babies make this leap 46 weeks after the due date. However, some babies make the leap one or two weeks sooner, or one or two weeks later.

@55 Weeks (Leap of “Programs”): The Dishwasher is Having a Big Party

In the world of “programs” for the first time your baby is able to perceive a whole sequence of actions as one thing. Now he recognizes that putting a dirty plate in the water, moving the brush or sponge over it, and placing it in the rack for the water to drip down is “washing dishes.” He loves to help you with such tasks. And of course he likes to produce a lot of foam.

Note: Most babies make this leap 55 weeks after the due date. However, some babies make the leap one week sooner, some one week later

@64 Weeks: (Leap of “Principals”) Begging for Rules and the Start of Science!

At the ninth leap, around 64 weeks or almost 15 months, your baby changes drastically. Suddenly he is no longer a little baby, but a real toddler. He has a new ability to observe and handle “principles.” Because he has risen above the previous confines of “programs,” he has shed their rigid character. Before this leap of principles, our little helper was still bound by certain strict programs, which tended to be a tad mechanical in nature. Although he had learned what to do to achieve his goal, he always did it in the same sequence. He wasn’t able to adapt to circumstances. That will change after this leap of principles.

For the first time, your child is able to evaluate existing programs and even to change them and you will see her constantly doing so – or trying to - then studying the effects. You can also see her do all kinds of “physical antics” , exploring the great outdoors, becoming skillful with objects and language, imitating others, replaying the day-to-day, trying out her emotions, beginning to plan, staging her own drama class and throwing temper tantrums, insisting on taking part, using aggression, learning what’s hers and what’s not, using gags as a strategy to an end, experimenting with “yes” and “no,” becoming resourceful in putting people on the spot, learning to cooperate, wanting to help out around the house and experimenting with being “reckless” and being “careful.” It is a very busy time!

You will also notice your little one begging for rules, now that she’s entered the world of principles. She is looking for chances to familiarize herself with them. Just like she must satisfy her appetite by eating, so, too, must she satisfy her yearning for rules. Social rules in particular are important: you must show her what is acceptable and what is not acceptable socially. There is no harm in laying down the law. On the contrary, you owe it to her, and who better to do so than someone who loves her?

@75 Weeks: (Leap of “Systems”) He Chooses Tactics to Reach His Goal

At the tenth leap, around 75 weeks or a good 17 months, your toddler gets the new ability to observe and manipulate "systems." Just as her programs were rigid before she had risen to new heights after taking her ninth leap, so too were her principles lacking certain flexibility before this tenth leap. She was only able to apply them in a set way, always the same, regardless of the situation.

When your toddler enters into the world of systems, he is now able to see clearly over the world of principles. He no longer applies principles as rigidly as before. He is able to adjust his

principles to changing circumstances. For instance, he is now able to choose to apply a moral principle, or not. From this age on, you can see him develop the tender beginnings of a conscience, by systematically upholding his norms and values. And, very distinct systems in your toddler's world begin to emerge:

- *Me and My Notion of Self*

The system with which your toddler most comes in contact is herself. That is what she gets to know first, and it has all sorts of consequences. Your toddler discovers that she is the owner of her own body and that she has control over her own body. She also discovers that she can make things happen, that she has her own will and she can make her own decisions, and that she has power to influence. She thinks in terms of me, me, me!

- *Me and You*

At this stage, your toddler begins to understand that mom and dad are separate people. He starts using terms as "you" and "me" and is also very interested in both mom's and dad's physique. He sizes up all the similarities and differences to a "T". For the first time in his life, your toddler can put himself in someone else's place, now that he realizes that not all people are alike. For the first time he sees that not everyone likes the same things as he does. That would have never occurred to him when he was younger. We can sum this up with one elegant word, he has become less egocentric. That has all sorts of consequences. He is now able to comfort someone. He is at his high point in mimicry. He copies anything and everything around him. His imagination comes to life. Your explorer is also fascinated by other living creatures: ants, dogs and so forth. They are all systems, too.

- *Me and My Family or Friends*

Your toddler starts realizing that she is part of a family, and that her family is different from her little friend's family, whom she visits twice a week. After all, her family is the first human organization she gets to know from the inside, and she makes no mistake about noticing that her little friend's family doesn't necessarily have a salad with their dinner like her own family. In her family they have a different set of rules.

Just as your toddler recognizes her family as a system, she begins to distinguish her family from others. She already does the same with her friends, house and neighborhood. She is getting better at finding her way around in the familiar surroundings outside of her house.

She starts paying great attention to her clothes. She can be quite vain and is very possessive of her toys.

- *Me and My Art*

Your little artist starts to create art with a capital "A": he no longer scribbles, now he draws "horses," "boats" and "himself." He also begins to appreciate music—that, too, is a system. He also starts to develop a sense of time. He is now better able to recall past experiences and to understand better what the future will bring.

- *Me and My Talking*

She will now begin forming her first sentences. This is not to imply that every toddler does this, though. Just as with other skills, children differ greatly in the age at which they show a skill for the first time. All toddlers now understand much of what you say to them, but some are not ready to start speaking. Others use several words and constantly mime, but do not yet produce sentences. A few, though, do speak in sentences. Whether or not your toddler does, depends on how you interact with her.

Now What?

At the close of the first 20 months, your child is already well on his way to imitate its culture and learn to know the roles, mannerisms, symbols, tools, myths and institutions.

Now is when mimicry and pantomime play an important role. That is the basis of language development. Children begin to speak their first sentences (some children begin already with seventeen months, immediately after they have made the last leap).

How The Wonder Weeks Puts It All Together

The Wonder Weeks describes the ten leaps your baby makes in the first 20 months of his life, taking place around weeks 5, 8, 12, 19, 26, 37, 46, 55, 64 and 75. Each leap is discussed in a separate chapter, which includes reflections from other mothers about their babies' troublesome periods to offer support as new parents endure their baby's stormy periods. Each chapter is always divided into four parts:

- **This Week's Fussy Signs:** At the beginning of each chapter, this section describes the clues that your baby is about to make a developmental leap and the changes you can expect if a leap arrives.
- **The Magical Leap Forward:** This part describes the new ability your baby will acquire during the current leap. Furthermore, it contains an extensive list of new skills and practices, which may result from the leap. Your baby may only exhibit a few of the skills listed initially - he cannot decide to do everything at once! You can use the list to see what new behaviors your baby chooses which are based on your baby's preferences and which are unique to your baby.
- **What You Can Do to Help:** This section gives you suggestions for games, activities and toys appropriate to each stage of development, which will increase your baby's awareness and satisfaction – and enhance playtime.
- **After the Leap:** Here you can see that your baby is again easier, happier and more independent.

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The Wonder Weeks is available at www.thewonderweeks.com, Amazon.com, Amazon.co.uk and at most online booksellers.

More information about The Wonder Weeks, including details about the research behind the book, can be found at www.thewonderweeks.com and (in video) <http://www.youtube.com/thewonderweeks>. To schedule an interview with Dr. Frans X. Plooij or to receive additional background, please contact: Xaviera Plas @ +31 6 418 414 73 or email xaviera@thewonderweeks.com