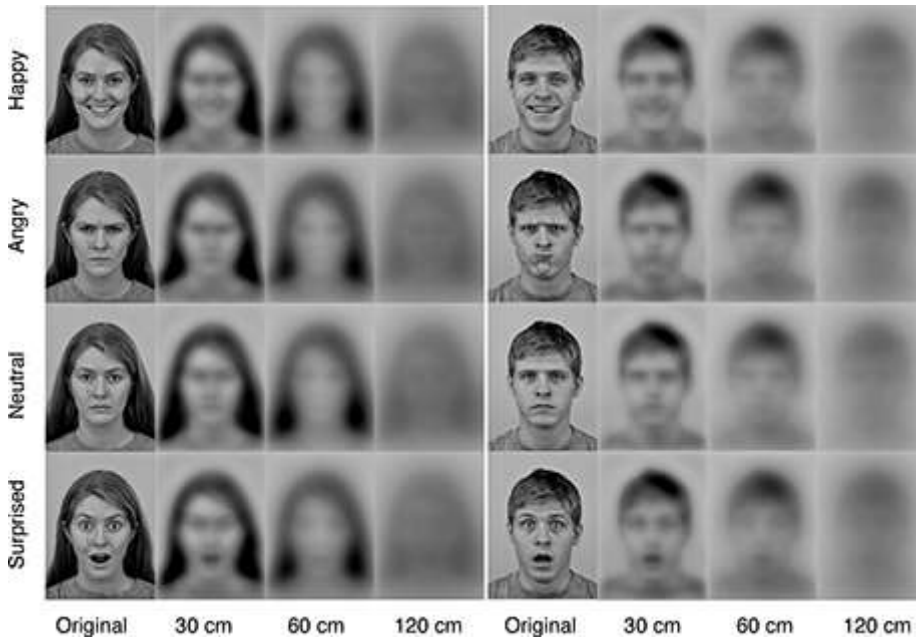


What to expect at your child's first eye exam

As your baby leaves the dark, quiet comfort of your womb and enters the bright, noisy world around her, just what can she see? The short answer: Not much — but that will change, and fast. In the first six months of life, baby's eyesight develops rapidly, since vision is closely linked to brain development. So as your baby's brain matures in leaps and bounds, so does her eyesight. While it does, enjoy seeing baby take it all in as she reaches a few key milestones in visual development.



Your newborn's vision: Birth to a few weeks old

- **Vision is fuzzy.** [In utero](#), [baby's eyes](#) begin growing at around week 4 of pregnancy and can perceive light at around week 16. But a fetus's eyelids remain closed until 26 weeks gestation — and even then, the view from the womb is pretty limited. That means when your baby enters her newly expanded world, it's a kaleidoscope of fuzzy images to her unaccustomed eyes. At first, the farthest your baby will be able to see is the distance from your arms to your face (about 8 to 10 inches).
- **Will baby look at you?** Some [newborns](#) do look directly at your face after birth (“Hi, Mom!”), while others keep those peepers tightly squeezed shut (“*Excuse me, I was sleeping!*”). Both reactions are perfectly normal: While some infants naturally focus on faces and objects, others need a little more time to adjust to the newly expanded world around them. Your own baby's pace will depend on everything from her gestational age to her individual personality.
- **Loving faces.** Either way, for the first month baby's eyes will, for the most part, be closed as she sleeps for long stretches of time. When her eyes do open, she's can't yet track moving objects. Still, babies of this age generally do love looking at faces — so make sure to give your little one lots of up-close-and-personal time with you and other caretakers.

Your baby's vision: 2 to 3 months old

- **Baby might recognize you.** At this age, some babies may start to recognize faces (and [treat you to a first smile](#)) — but their sight is still fairly blurry. Babies who are born prematurely may take a bit longer to focus on your face, but don't fret: They will catch up developmentally. In all likelihood your baby will be checking you out in detail in no time.
- **Your baby is starting to see color.** While experts aren't certain of how much color newborns can see, this is when they're likely able to begin noticing different hues.

Your baby's vision: 3 to 4 months old

- **Baby can see farther.** Has baby begun watching closely from her bouncy seat as you cook dinner on the far side of the room? That's because around this age, babies can see anywhere from several feet in front of them to all the way across the room.
- **Tracking with her eyes.** By 4 months old, your baby can also track faster movements with her eyes, perceive depth and [even grab at moving objects](#) — although her hand-eye coordination may not yet allow her to actually hold onto the target of her attention.
- **Eyes work together.** Perhaps the most exciting part of baby's sight at this stage is that her eyes are starting to work together, and she's developing depth perception. (Which means that your little one can finally recognize your face with much more clarity.)
- **Baby's color preferences show.** By now, your baby's vision has nearly fully developed. Babies can notice differences in shades of color (especially red and green) and may even begin favoring specific ones.

Your baby's vision: 12 months old

- **Baby sees like you!** As you light the candles on her first birthday cake, your baby is finally able to see as much as the singing adults around her.

How to help improve your baby's eyesight

The best ways to improve your baby's eyesight are simple — you may already do many of these naturally:

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- **Chat baby up.** When you're breast- or bottle-feeding, your face is close enough for even the youngest baby to see — and it's also conveniently one of her favorite things to observe. So talk to her while you look her in the eyes — you'll bond and help her begin to learn language, too.
- **Hang a mobile.** Babies love images with contrasting colors and patterns. So until [your little one is able to sit up](#) (at about month 3 or 4), securely hang a colorful, patterned mobile high above her crib or bouncy seat. (Just make sure to remove it as soon as she can sit to prevent her from becoming entangled).

- **Mirror her.** Another visual hit with babies: mirrors. While they can't [recognize themselves](#) until about month 15, they do love seeing the changing image reflected back at them as they move.
- **Bring baby along for the ride.** Bring baby in a forward-facing carrier as you go about your day — whether you're taking a walk around your neighborhood, shopping for groceries or just brushing your teeth. Describe what you see to boost her verbal development at the same time she's observing the world around her.

A Look At Your Newborn

Signs of baby vision problems

While many infant vision problems are only detectable by a pediatrician or an ophthalmologist, you can take a few steps to ensure early intervention on any potential issues:

- **Snap photos.** While “red eye” isn't the look you're going for, this nuisance actually shows that baby's eyes are correctly refracting light. Pictures that show whiteness in baby's pupils, on the other hand, indicate a condition known as leukocoria, which may signal serious problems (such as a cataract or a tumor) that require attention from a pediatrician right away.
- **Watch for focus.** In the first few months, it's normal for a baby's eyes to sometimes seem like they're looking in different directions (a condition known as strabismus). However if this continues past 4 months, take your child to a pediatrician for an evaluation. Same goes if your baby doesn't seem to focus on your face and instead appears to be looking through or around you, or if she consistently seems to be looking off to one side.
- **Check if she's interested in objects.** If by around month 4 your baby can't track objects or by month 7 doesn't seem interested in any new visuals you show her (like that bright new toy you just bought), check in with your doctor.
- **Monitor for [other eye issues](#).** Other symptoms that merit a trip to the doctor include bulging eyes, eyes that seem to quickly flutter up and down or side to side, constant redness or wateriness, sensitivity to light, itchy eyes or eye pain.

If you notice any of the above or any other visual issues that don't seem quite right, don't hesitate to bring baby to the doctor for an exam.

What to expect at your child's first eye exam

If you're regularly seeing your baby's doctor, you should catch any issues early — pediatricians regularly screen babies for vision problems at checkups. If your doctor does notice any potential issues, he may refer you to a pediatric ophthalmologist.

Some children, including preemies, babies with Down syndrome or those with a family history of eye issues, should see an ophthalmologist in the first few months of life. Otherwise, if your child has no risk factors, her first vision screening should be at age 3 and a half or 4 years old, since that's when kids can verbalize what they see (and a whole lot more) — including what's on an eye chart.