What is the average length for a baby?

Medically reviewed by Mia Armstrong, MD — Written by Zawn Villines — Updated on March 31, 2023

Average lengths What if they are too small or large?
When to speak with a doctor Feeding a newborn Summary

The average length for a newborn is 19–20 inches (in) (48.2–50.8 centimeters [cm]) from the top of the head to the heel of the foot, but this can vary. Doctors also consider a range of 18.5–20.9 in (47–53 cm) to be typical.

Male babies are also slightly longer than female babies, on average.

Most newborn babies follow a predictable level of growth during their first year. People can track the length of their baby using average growth charts.

This article looks at the average baby length, month-by-month, for the first year of life. We also discuss what it means when a baby is shorter or longer than average and when to speak with a doctor.

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The World Health Organization (WHO) publishes standard infant growth charts according to the expected growth of children in six countries, including the United States, in optimal growth environments. This includes those who engage in breastfeeding.

It is important to note that most people use the terms “length” and “height” interchangeably. However, until the age of 2 years, most doctors will measure babies’ lengths lying down. In measurement terms, experts call this recumbent length. This is different from height, which doctors will measure after the age of 2 years when a child is able to stand.

In the first year of their lives, babies typically grow in length by 50%. According to the WHO’s growth charts, the average lengths for male babies and female babies by month are as follows:

Age	Male baby	Female baby
Birth	19.69 in (50 cm)	19.29 in (49 cm)
1 month	21.65 in (55 cm)	21.26 in (54 cm)
2 months	23.03 in (58.5 cm)	22.44 in (57 cm)
3 months	24.21 in (61.5 cm)	23.62 in (60 cm)
4 months	25.20 in (64 cm)	24.41 in (62 cm)
5 months	25.98 in (66 cm)	25.20 in (64 cm)
6 months	26.77 in (68 cm)	25.48 in (66 cm)
7 months	27.17 in (69 cm)	26.38 in (67 cm)
8 months	27.95 in (71 cm)	27.17 in (69 cm)
9 months	28.35 in (72 cm)	27.56 in (70 cm)
10 months	28.74 in (73 cm)	28.15 in (71.5 cm)
11 months	29.33 in (74.5 cm)	28.74 in (73 cm)
12 months	29.92 in (76 cm)	29.13 in (74 cm)

It is important to note that the above numbers represent averages. Children can be healthy at a wide range of heights. No matter how long a baby is at birth, they are likely to grow at similar rates to other babies.

This means that if a baby is born longer than average, they are likely to stay this way during their first or second year of growth.

A baby’s growth in length during the first year almost always depends on their length at birth, unless they have significant issues, such as feeding difficulties or medical problems, that may cause insufficient length or weight gain.

For this reason, length alone does not reveal whether a baby is healthy. Weight is also an important consideration, especially since many

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Most healthy babies follow a similar growth pattern during the first year of life. After that, growth rates vary, and a baby's length is not usually a good predictor of their height as an adult.

A parent or caregiver who takes their baby in for measuring should also know that an infant's measured length can vary according to who is doing the measuring and how much the baby is moving around at the time. Research shows that length measurements during infant well checkups have the most measurement errors.

Therefore, if it seems there is an unexpected change in a baby's length from one visit to the next, it can be due to differences in measuring. A person may wish to request another measurement during the visit or at the next one to rule out a legitimate issue.

What does it mean if a baby is small or large?

Babies who are much smaller or larger than average in weight and length are more likely to experience health complications.

However, there is a wide variation in healthy birth weights, so parents and caregivers may not need to have concerns. A doctor will assess how closely they need to monitor a baby's growth over time. Growth rates for length are fairly predictable among babies in the first year of life. Doctors are more interested in a baby's overall growth pattern than their length.

A child who falls below the 5th percentile may have an atypical growth pattern. By the age of 12 months, having a length of 28.5 in as a male infant or 27.5 in for a female infant puts them below the fifth percentile.

However, this may not be apparent immediately. A baby who will be a tall adult may have a shorter length at birth and in the first year or two of life.

Numerous other factors may affect a child's height, including:

- **Genetics:** Children are likely to be a similar height to their biological parents.
- **The pregnancy:** Research shows that factors, such as maternal anemia, high blood pressure, gestational diabetes, or obesity, may impact a baby's growth after birth.
- **Nutrition:** Following a nutritious diet supports healthy growth.
- **Hormones:** Some children with hormonal imbalances grow slowly or more quickly than their peers.
- **Health:** A baby whose growth slows down that they fall into a much lower length group or whose length is persistently at a lower level may have a health issue. Some children with certain genetic conditions, such as Down syndrome, may be smaller than others.
- **Medications:** Some medications, such as steroids, including prednisone, may stunt growth.

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When to speak with a doctor

During the first year of life, children should see their pediatrician at least seven times to monitor growth and overall health.

However, doctors' recommendations may vary slightly. In general, a pediatrician will want to examine the baby at the following times in the first year:

- 3–5 days old
- 1 month old
- 2 months old
- 4 months old
- 6 months old
- 9 months old
- 12 months

A healthcare professional may recommend more frequent visits for a baby who loses a lot of weight after birth or has an unusual growth pattern.

How much to feed newborns

In the early weeks of life, it can be difficult for parents or caregivers to know how much to feed a newborn. If the baby loses weight after birth, there could be feelings of pressure to help them regain the weight as quickly as possible, especially if the infant was born prematurely or has other health risk factors.

However, the amount of food newborns eat affects their weight much more than their length in the early stages of life. Insufficient weight gain needs to be present for a long time in infants before it affects their length.

Insufficient growth in length by itself in the first year is very uncommon and would more likely be due to a genetic syndrome or other uncommon condition.

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Most breastfed newborns eat every 1–3 hours. Over time, the time between feedings may expand to 2–4 hours. People can feed the baby on demand by following the baby's feeding cues.

Since a nursing person cannot measure how much milk they are giving the baby, they can gauge whether the baby is getting enough milk by looking at the frequency of nursing and diaper changes. These indicators include the following:

- The baby is nursing at least 8–12 times in 24 hours
- By day 2, the baby should have at least two wet diapers in 24 hours. By day days 3 and 4, at least three or more wet diapers, and by day 5, at least six or more wet diapers.
- By day 4, at least 3–5 bowel movements a day.
- The baby is gaining weight.

How much should formula-fed babies eat?

Formula-fed babies may eat less frequently than breastfed babies. After the first few days, people typically feed formula-fed babies with 1–2 ounces (oz) of milk per feeding, which may increase to 2–4 oz by the end of the first month.

Like breastfed newborns, formula-fed infants should eventually eat 8–12 times in 24 hours, including at night. This will continue until they are approximately 6 months old when the child is ready to begin eating solid foods.

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Summary

Like adults, babies are unique — there is no right or ideal length. As long as the infant is growing normally and does not suddenly fall well below their previous growth percentile, they are usually fine.

Before the age of 2 years, doctors usually measure a baby's length lying down. After the age of 2 years, when a child is able to stand, a doctor can begin to measure their standing height.

Caregivers should know that at this stage, doctors may switch from the

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Since standing height measures slightly less than recumbent length, a child's classification may change slightly at this point. The pediatrician can help parents and caregivers answer questions about length, growth, nutrition, and more.

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