In this letter you’ll find helpful resources and learn about:

• Preparing for your baby’s four-month checkup.
• Which immunizations your baby will need at the four-month checkup.
• Breastmilk and formula.
• How sleep helps your baby grow.
• How to prevent your baby from getting a flat head.
• How to take care of your body so you can take care of your baby.

Well-Child Visits

Schedule your baby’s four-month checkup

Your baby will grow and change quickly in the first year. That’s why checkups are needed so often during this time. The four-month checkup is the perfect time to ask questions about your baby’s health, growth, and development, and immunizations. Take notes during the visit. You may want to share them with your baby’s caregivers. Bring your baby’s Lifetime Immunization Record and Childhood Health Record with you to every appointment. You should have received these two booklets in your first Child Profile mailing. To view your family’s immunizations online, visit wa.myir.net.

Immunizations

Immunize your baby on time

It’s best to immunize your baby at the earliest recommended age. Infants are more likely than older children to become very ill, be hospitalized, or even die from diseases that vaccines can prevent. For example, nine out of ten deaths from whooping cough occur in infants younger than six months of age. Your baby can be immunized even if he or she is taking antibiotics or has a minor illness, such as a cold, diarrhea, or a fever. The vaccines your baby receives will still be effective and won’t make him or her sicker. The following vaccines are recommended at the four-month checkup:

- Rotavirus (RV)
- Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTPa)
- Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib)
- Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV)
- Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV)
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- Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV)
- Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV)

Until your baby is old enough to get vaccinated against flu, chickenpox, and measles, be sure those in close contact with your baby are immunized. If you have questions, talk to your baby’s doctor, nurse, or clinic staff.

Nutrition and Physical Activity

Babies only need breastmilk or formula now

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends breastfeeding your baby for a year. Breastfed babies are less likely to get colds, ear infections, diarrhea, and allergies and are less likely to experience Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), diabetes, and obesity. Breastfeeding also helps immunizations work better, but breastfeeding alone doesn’t protect your baby from diseases that vaccines can prevent. Be careful about buying or sharing breastmilk. It could be dangerous for babies. If breastmilk isn’t bought from a safe source or isn’t handled properly, babies can get sick. Ask for help if you’re having trouble breastfeeding. Talk to your doctor about connecting with a lactation consultant. For answers to breastfeeding questions, visit lllwa.org/get-help/helplines. If you’re on the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program, call your local WIC clinic.

Vitamin D is important for everyone. Give a vitamin D supplement to your baby if you breastfeed or if your baby drinks less than 32 ounces of formula a day. Ask your baby’s doctor or nurse about an iron supplement if you only breastfeed or if more than half of your baby’s feedings are breastmilk. Your baby may need an iron supplement until iron-rich foods are introduced at six months of age.

Hold your baby and talk to him or her while feeding. Your baby needs to cuddle with you and look at your face even when he or she is able to hold a bottle.

Your baby’s tummy won’t be ready for solid foods, including baby cereal, until about four to six months of age. You’ll know your baby is ready when he or she can sit with support, hold head steady, and swallow food from a spoon. Feeding your baby solids before he or she is ready may increase risk of obesity, food allergies, and constipation. Adding cereal to your baby’s bottle won’t help him or her fall asleep or sleep longer.

Sleep and your baby

Most babies this age wake up two or three times a night. Some wake up more, some less. This is normal, but may be hard for new parents. This pattern of sleeping and waking helps your baby’s brain grow and develop and keeps him or her safe and healthy. In a few months, your baby will start to sleep longer without waking. Some babies naturally need more or less sleep than others. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends you:

- Sleep in the same room as your baby, but on a separate sleep surface, for at least six months or for up to one year.
- Place your baby on his or her back in a crib with a tight-fitting sheet.
- Avoid using soft bedding in your baby’s crib.
- Keep your baby away from smoke, alcohol, and drugs.

Your family and your baby will develop your own sleep pattern. Start a positive bedtime routine at the same time every night. This may include a bath and diaper change and reading a book. Avoid loud noises and bright lights before bed. Lay your baby down on his or her back while your baby is drowsy but awake. This gives your baby practice falling asleep in bed. Don’t worry if he or she wakes up right away. Soothe your baby and try again when he or she is ready.

Prevent your baby from getting a flat head

Your baby might get a flat spot on his or her head from lots of time spent lying on his or her back. This is because your baby’s skull is soft and neck muscles are weak. Flattening usually goes away on its own. Give your baby plenty of “tummy time” when he or she is awake and you can watch. This will help keep your baby from getting a flat spot. It also helps make your baby stronger. Hold your baby in your arms often. If your baby is bottle fed, hold him or her on your right side for one feeding and on the left side for the next. If your baby is breastfed, he or she gets switched from side to side as you move him or her from one breast to the other.

Growth and Development

How to prevent your baby from falling.

How to reduce choking hazards.

Making a plan when your baby cries.

Lowering the risk of SIDS.

Preparing for your baby’s four-month checkup.

Which immunizations your baby will need at the four-month checkup.

Breastmilk and formula.

How sleep helps your baby grow.

How to prevent your baby from getting a flat head.

How to take care of your body so you can take care of your baby.

Happy reading!
**Family Support and Routines**

**Mom: Help your body recover from pregnancy**

Eat well and take care of yourself so you have energy to take care of your baby and do the things you love. Eat foods from each of the five food groups (protein, dairy, grains, fruits, and vegetables) every day. No single food can give your body everything it needs. Eat healthy snacks and avoid soda and sweetened drinks. Here are some other tips:

- Take prenatal vitamins or a multivitamin with iron and folic acid. They provide nutrients for your body.
- Try to get some exercise every day, such as walking outside. Start slowly. If you have questions about what exercise is safe for you, talk to your doctor.
- It’s healthiest to wait at least 18 to 24 months before getting pregnant again, especially if your baby was born early. To learn where to get low-cost birth control, call the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588.
- Get dental care.
- Try to reduce stress.
- If you smoke, try to quit. Call 1-800-784-8669 (1-800-QUIT-NOW) or visit quitline.com for help.

**Safety**

**Reduce your baby’s risk of SIDS**

To reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), always lay your baby on his or her back to sleep. Make sure everyone who takes care of your baby does this. Talk with your baby’s doctor or nurse about the best sleep position for special needs due to health or early birth. Keep soft objects, toys, crib bumpers, or loose bedding away from the sleep area. Keep your baby close to your bed but on a separate surface designed for infants. Babies who breathe any form of smoke are at higher risk of SIDS. Your baby may have an increased risk if cigarettes and/or marijuana are used around him or her. Keep your baby away from people while they are smoking tobacco or marijuana. Do not allow anyone to smoke in your home or car. Vaping is harmful and is not safe to do around your baby.

**Have a plan for when your baby cries**

All babies cry. It’s normal for babies to cry from two to four hours a day. Crying is one way your baby tells you what he or she needs. You may be able to tell the difference between your baby’s cry when he or she is hungry versus needing a diaper change or if he or she is just uncomfortable. Even though you know crying is normal, it may still be very stressful. Plan ahead for what to do if you ever feel like shaking or hurting your baby, such as:

- Gently lay your baby down on his or her back in a safe place and stay ten feet away.
- Take slow, deep breaths until you feel calmer.
- Call a friend or the Family Help Line at 1-800-932-4673.
- Share your plan. Make sure everyone who takes care of your baby knows they should never shake him or her. Tell them to call you right away if they get frustrated.

**Recognize postpartum depression**

If you feel sad, anxious, or like you can’t handle things, you may have postpartum depression (PPD). PPD is very common and does not mean you are not a good mother. Talk about your feelings with your doctor and people you trust. You can also call Pernatal Support Washington at 1-888-404-7763 or visit perinatalsupport.org. It is important to get help. Healthy feelings between you and your baby are important for your baby’s development.

**Your baby can choke on small things**

Babies explore by putting things in their mouths. Small toys can be dangerous. Anything small enough to slip into a toilet paper tube can choke your baby. Make sure older children do not give your baby small toys or pieces of food. Call your local hospital or health or fire department to find out about infant CPR and first aid classes.

**Prevent your baby from falling**

Always keep at least one hand on your baby when he or she is on a bed, sofa, or changing table. Your baby could make a sudden move and roll or wiggle off the edge. If you need to answer the door or the phone while changing your baby, carry him or her with you. You can also put him or her in the crib or in a safe place on the floor. If you use a play seat, use one without wheels. When your baby is in a reclining seat, make sure to buckle the safety strap.

**For the Health of All Our Children**

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@WatchMeGrowWA  www.watchmegrowwa.org

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This letter is available in other formats. Call the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588 (711 TTY relay) and ParentHelp123.org

Thanks for reading! Share this letter with other caregivers in your child’s life. You’ll hear from us again before your baby turns six months old with information on:

- Tips for starting solid foods.
- Your baby’s first teeth.
- Encouraging your baby to move.
- Baby-proofing tips.
- The dangers of baby walkers.

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