

# Newborn Reflexes



## **Rooting and sucking reflexes**

**What is it:** Stroke the side of your baby's cheek with your fingers or breast and he'll turn his head toward it, open wide, and begin to make sucking movements with his mouth. This most basic of survival instincts can be a big help to nursing mothers trying to teach their babies to latch on.

**Rooting** reflex: A newborn infant will turn its head toward anything that strokes its cheek or mouth, searching for the object by moving its head in steadily decreasing arcs until the object is found. After becoming used to responding in this way (if breastfed, approximately three weeks after birth), the infant will move directly to the object without searching

The **sucking** reflex is common to all [mammals](#) and is present at birth. It is linked with the rooting reflex and breastfeeding. It causes the child to instinctively suck anything that touches the roof of their mouth, and simulates the way a child naturally eats. There are two stages of the action:

1. **Expression:** activated when the [nipple](#) is placed between a child's lips and touches their palate. They will instinctively press it between their tongue and palate to draw out the milk.
2. **Milking:** The tongue moves from [areola](#) to nipple, coaxing milk from the mother to be swallowed by the child.

**When It Disappears:** About four months.



### **Moro (or startle) reflex**

**What is it:** Sit your baby upright for a few seconds with your hands lightly gripping her underarms, and your fingers supporting her neck then suddenly but gently lower her back a bit. She'll throw out her arms and legs and extend her neck, as if to say, Pick me up! Loud, unexpected noises may elicit this reflex, and she may even cry when especially startled.

It is likely to occur if the infant's head suddenly shifts position, the temperature changes abruptly, or they are startled by a sudden noise. The legs and head extend while the arms jerk up and out with the palms up and thumbs flexed. Shortly afterward the arms are brought together and the hands clench into fists, and the infant cries loudly.<sup>[9]</sup> The reflex normally disappears by three to four months of age,<sup>[10]</sup> though it may last up to six months. In human evolutionary history, the Moro reflex may have helped infants cling to the mother while being carried around. If the infant lost its balance, the reflex caused the infant to embrace its mother and regain its hold on the mother's body

**When It Disappears:** Around two months.



**What It Is: Walking (or stepping) reflex**

**What is it:** Hold your baby under his armpits with his legs dangling, then lower him so his toes touch the floor. He should immediately place one foot in front of the other and start to “walk” in place. Babies need something to push against with their feet to help them self attach during breastfeeding.

Plantar reflex of feet: If you stroke the sole of her foot, she’ll curl up her toes. To grip onto mother particularly when she is moving.

**When It Disappears:** Around two months. (The beginning of the building blocks needed for walking later on).



### **Grasp reflex**

**What is it:** Stroke your baby's palm with your finger. She'll immediately grab your finger and hold on so tight you might have to pry her little fingers off. It's her way of holding you and trying to get as much skin-to-skin contact as she can. The grip is strong but unpredictable; though it may be able to support the child's weight, they may also release their grip suddenly and without warning. The reverse motion can be induced by stroking the back or side of the hand.

**When It Disappears:** Gradually, beginning in about the third month. But reappears after 4 months when babies can start holding things for longer periods.



### **Tonic neck (or fencing) reflex**

**What is it:** When your baby is lying on his back, gently turn his head to the right. His right arm will shoot out in front of him and he'll raise his other arm above his head. He'll do the same thing on the opposite side if you turn his head to the left. According to researchers, the tonic neck reflex is a precursor to the hand/eye coordination of the infant. It also prepares the infant for voluntary reaching. [\[8\]](#)

**When It Disappears:** Between four and five months



### **Righting reflex**

**What is it:** Gently drop a blanket over your baby's face. She'll automatically shake her head from side to side and flail her arms until it falls off—it's your baby's way of protecting herself. As she gets bigger, this reflex will evolve as necessary. For instance, when she's learning to sit up, she'll automatically stick her hand out to catch herself if she begins to topple over.

**When It Disappears:** Toward the end of the first year, as muscle tone and control improve.



### **Tongue-thrust reflex**

**What is it:** Touch a baby spoon to the tip of her tongue and watch her push it back out. This reflex prevents her from choking on foreign objects.

**When It Disappears:** Between four and six months, which is one reason why it doesn't usually make sense to attempt solid feeding any earlier after all these years of debate. Each baby should only start solids when their tongue thrust reflex has disappeared.



### **Withdrawal reflex**

**What is it:** When your baby is sitting contentedly in his bouncy seat, suddenly bring your face close to his. He'll quickly turn his head away in another attempt at self-protection. He'll do the same if it's an object headed his way (you may have noticed it in the blanket test just above), to avoid a collision.

**When It Disappears:** Fortunately, it lasts a lifetime! Or at least until that cute chick from algebra zooms in for a kiss.



**The Galant reflex**, also known as *Galant's infantile reflex*, is present at birth and fades between the ages of four to six months. When the skin along the side of an infant's back is stroked, the infant will swing towards the side that was stroked. It appears to take an active role in the birth process, with movements of the hip helping the baby to work its way down the birth canal.

**The Babkin reflex** occurs in newborn babies, and describes varying responses to the application of pressure to both palms. Infants may display head flexion, head rotation, opening of the mouth, or a combination of these responses. Soon it evolves into the voluntary eye-hand-mouth coordination necessary for food intake as the control of the prefrontal cortex over the nonprimary motor cortices becomes predominant