

Understanding Your Baby's Fontanelles: A Guide for Parents



Highlights

Fontanelles are soft spots on your baby's head where the skull bones haven't fully fused yet.

These areas are essential for the normal growth and development of your baby's brain and skull.

Your healthcare provider will monitor the fontanelles during routine checkups.

A newborn's skull is made up of sections connected by fibrous joints called sutures, allowing for flexibility.

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What are Fontanelles?

Fontanelles are soft spots on your baby's head, where the skull bones have not yet fused. These soft areas are important for allowing your baby's brain and skull to grow properly.

When Will My Baby's Fontanelles Close?

Fontanelles typically close by the time your baby is 26 months old.

The posterior fontanelle usually closes by the time your baby is about 2 months old.

The anterior fontanelle can close anytime between 4 and 26 months of age, and tends to close earlier in male children than in female children.

Can I Touch My Baby's Fontanelles?

It's safe to gently touch your baby's fontanelles. Running your fingers softly along your baby's head will let you feel them. There's no need to be concerned as long as you're gentle.

What Does a Normal Fontanelle Look Like?

A normal fontanelle should feel soft and slightly sunken. You may notice a slight pulsation due to blood flow in the vessels around the brain, which is completely normal.

The fontanelle should not be bulging or sunken beyond normal levels. If there are changes, consult your doctor.

What If a Fontanelle Closes Too Soon?

Early closure of fontanelles may be caused by conditions like:

Hyperthyroidism or hyperparathyroidism \ (high hormone levels)

Craniosynostosis \ (early fusion of sutures in the skull)

If you notice that your baby's fontanelles closed too early or if their skull

shape seems unusual, seek medical advice immediately.

What If a Fontanelle Doesn't Close?

Delayed closure may be a sign of underlying issues such as:

Congenital hypothyroidism (low thyroid hormones)

Down syndrome

Increased brain pressure

Rickets

Familial macrocephaly (genetic large head)

Consult your doctor if you suspect delayed closure of the fontanelle.

When Should I See My Doctor?

You should consult a doctor if:

You notice a sunken or bulging fontanelle.

A fontanelle hasn't closed by the time your baby is 2 years old.

Your baby shows signs of dehydration, poor feeding, or unusual head shapes.

Tools and Assistance

To help you monitor and care for your baby's fontanelles, the following tools and guidelines can be helpful:

Baby Health Monitoring Apps: Some mobile apps help parents track their baby's development and milestones, including growth patterns related to head circumference and fontanelle closure. These apps can be used to note when changes occur and remind you to check on your baby's progress.

Pediatrician Checkups: Regular visits to your pediatrician are crucial for monitoring your baby's fontanelles. They will assess your baby's skull and brain development and can advise you on any concerns. Make sure to attend all scheduled appointments.

Growth Chart: A growth chart is useful to track your baby's growth and development over time, including head circumference, which can indicate if your baby is progressing normally or if any issues arise.

Thermometers: Using a reliable baby thermometer is essential in monitoring your baby's overall health, especially if you are concerned about fever, which may be linked to an underlying condition affecting the fontanelles, like infection or dehydration.

Fontanelle Guides: You can use online guides or informational brochures about fontanelles to help you understand the normal range of fontanelle characteristics, including size, shape, and changes over time. These guides are also helpful for identifying potential concerns and when to seek medical advice.

Emergency Contact Information: Having the contact details of your pediatrician or a healthcare professional on hand is crucial for quick access if you notice abnormal changes in your baby's fontanelles, such as sunken or bulging spots.

Cranial Molding Helmets: In cases where a baby may have craniosynostosis (early fusion of skull sutures), doctors may recommend cranial molding helmets to help shape the skull as it develops. These helmets are custom-made and are typically used when prescribed by a pediatric specialist.

Hydration Monitoring Tools: To ensure your baby is well-hydrated, use baby hydration monitoring tools like a wet diaper tracker or a simple daily log of feedings to check if your baby is getting enough fluids.