PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Your Child's Development From 18 to 24 Months

This information lists the skills your child will likely learn between 18 and 24 months.

Movement and physical development

Between 18 and 24 months, your child may learn to:

- Climb up and down from furniture without help.
- Walk up and down stairs with help.
- Walk backwards and sideways.
- Jump.
- Run.
- Kick a ball.
- Throw a ball and try to catch it.
- Draw or trace straight lines and circles.
- Can put large beads on a string.

Social-emotional and self-help skills

Between 18 and 24 months, your child may:

- Show different emotions, such as jealousy, fear, anger, joy, and love.
- Get easily frustrated and like to be in control.
- Copy others.
- Play alone for a few minutes.
- Have trouble sharing.
- Remove their shoes if their shoelaces are undone.
- Zip and unzip large zippers.
- Play with food.
- Wash their hands with help.
- Know the difference between things that you can eat and things that are you cannot eat.

Learning, thinking, and problem solving skills

Between 18 and 24 months, your child may:

- Like to play with Play-Doh® and paint.
- Put glue on paper.
- Point to clothing items when they’re named.
- Explore cabinets and drawers.

- Match sounds to animals.
- Start to sort shapes and colors.
- Build towers of 4 or more blocks.

Speech, language, and communication skills

Between 18 and 24 months, your child may:

- Try to sing to music.
- Express feelings by using more complex sounds, such as “uh-oh” or “yeah.”
- Have a vocabulary of at least 20 to 50 words.
- Talk and point at the same time.
- Point to a few body parts when you ask them to.
- Follow simple directions, such as “roll the ball” or “kiss the baby.”
- Respond to simple questions, such as “who’s that?” or “where’s your shoe?.”
- Listen to simple stories, songs, and rhymes.
- Point to pictures in a book when you name them.
- Use a lot of new words.
- Start to name pictures in books.
- Ask questions, such as “what’s that?” and “who’s that?.”
- Put 2 to 3 words together, such as “more apple, please,”

and “no bed.”

What you can do to help your child’s development

Your child may not have a lot of energy during their treatment. But it’s still important to help them move, communicate, and play as part of their daily routine.

Here are some things you can do to help them:

- Have your child climb on and off furniture while playing.
- Practice going up and down the stairs while holding hands.
- Practice catching, throwing, and kicking a ball.
- Play a game of follow the leader.
- Have your child draw using different colored crayons and markers.
- Get your child to play with blocks, shape sorting games, and puzzles.
- Talk to your child as you do things and go places.
- Use short words and sentences that your child can copy. Use correct grammar.
- Play with sounds during activities. For example, you can blow bubbles and make the sound “b-b-b-b” or pop bubbles and make a “p-p-p-p” sound.

- Add to words your child says. For example, if they say “car,” you can say, “You’re right! That is a big red car.”
- Talk about the pictures in books.
- Have your child point to pictures that you name.
- Ask your child to name pictures. Even if they do not answer, keep naming pictures. One day, they will surprise you by telling you the name.
- Engage in play during feeding.
- Eat while your child is eating. When possible, share foods.
- Do not force feed your child if they do not want to eat.

When to call your child’s healthcare provider

Call your child’s healthcare provider if your child:

- Falls often or easily.
- Does not walk with ease.
- Is not able to run.
- Does not follow simple instructions.
- Does not use 2-word phrases, such as “drink milk.”
- Loses skills they once had.
- Does not like changes in their environment, such as changes to the noise level or lighting in the room.

- Is a picky eater or relying on bottle feeding.
- Is not starting to eat solid foods.
- Is not naming familiar people or items.

Contact information

If you have questions about your child's development, talk with their healthcare provider. You can also ask for a referral to MSK's physical, occupational, or speech therapy.

You can reach MSK's Physical and Occupational Therapy department Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. at 212-639-5384. You can reach the Speech and Hearing Rehabilitation department Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 212-639-5856.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Your Child's Development From 18 to 24 Months - Last updated on April 30, 2026
All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center