

# Reflex and Characteristics

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Newborns depend on their inherent reflexes for survival. Absence or extended duration of these reflexes could indicate a problem with the baby's central nervous system. Just after birth, the newborn will be assessed for the following reflexes:

**Rooting Reflex** - when a finger or nipple is placed into the baby's mouth, the baby begins to suck. Also, if you lightly stroke the cheek, the newborn will turn towards the stroking and open her mouth to accept the nipple. This reflex usually lasts for up to seven months.

**Palmar and Plantar Grasp Reflexes** - the baby will grasp an object placed in his hands or curl his toes around fingers placed near his toes. The palmar reflex usually lasts three to four months and the plantar can last up to a year.

**Moro's Reflex** - this startle reflex appears with a sudden loud noise or any intense stimulation. The arms and legs extend and the fingers fan outward, with the thumb and forefinger forming a C-shape. This reflex usually disappears within three to four months.

**Tonic Neck Reflex** - the baby appears like a "fencer" when lying flat on her back and facing to the side. Whichever direction her face is turned, that arm will extend and the other will be flexed. Babies may sleep in this position for a couple of years; however, an awake baby should not display this reflex beyond four months of age. Prolonged display of this reflex in an awake state could be an indication of cerebral palsy.

**Doll's Eye Reflex** - as with a doll's eyes, when a baby is lying on her back, if you turn her head from side to side, her eyes remain fixed. This reflex lasts up to two months of age.

**Babinski's Reflex** - the baby's toes will hyperextend when the bottom of his foot is stroked upward from the sole to the ball of his foot. This reflex disappears within a year.

**Stepping Reflex** - when the newborn is held upright with the feet on a flat surface, the baby will make stepping motions. This reflex diminishes by the fourth month and does not return until the baby begins to stand and walk.

**Bauer's Reflex** - when pressure is applied to the soles of the feet of a newborn lying face-down, the baby will make crawling movements. This disappears by six weeks of age and returns when the baby is learning to crawl.

**Traction Reflex** - when a newborn is pulled up by the wrists to a sitting position, her head will first fall back, then lift upright and held before it falls forward onto the chest. This is a sign of maturity and muscle tone.

**Arm Recoil** - the baby's arms will flex rapidly after extending them.



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