

## SCIENCE & HEALTH

### WHEN YOUR BABY IS **OUTSIDE THE NORM**

Sometimes late bloomers benefit from early therapy

By Laura Johannes  
Register Staff

**NEW HAVEN** — Yale medical students file into Dr. Richard S.K. Young's child development class prepared to learn exactly what behavior is normal for kids at each age.

But before Young begins teaching them the nitty-gritty technical details they are expecting, he surprises them with a children's book: "Leo the Late Bloomer" — about a little lion who can't keep up with the other animals. It goes like this:

"What's the matter with Leo," asked Leo's father. "Nothing," said Leo's mother. "Leo is just a late bloomer."

"Better late than never," thought Leo's father. That, says Young — a neurologist who heads the pediatrics department at the Hospital of St. Raphael — illustrates the most important caveat doctors and parents should use when comparing their children to the norm.

"Every child is an individual," Young said. "Sometimes there isn't any reason to worry unnecessarily." With that said, there are certain developmental milestones pediatricians and parents should expect, Young and others said.

If babies fall outside the normal range of development, it could be a warning that the child needs help. The easiest-to-detect problems are cerebral palsy and Down's syndrome, but more subtle developmental problems — such as fetal alcohol syndrome — are also a possibility, said Dr. Robert LaCamera, medical director of the Easter Seals Rehabilitation Center on Hamilton Street.

**Much better off:** For one New Haven mother, who asked not to be named, early therapy for a developmental problem has made a significant difference for her 2½-year-old daughter.

In her crib, the little girl was "floppy and limp," the mother said. She was unable to lift her head, staying until she was 6 months old "with her neck always limp and tilted."

Even before the cause of the developmental delay was identified as tuberous sclerosis, an inherited disorder, the family pediatrician referred her to the Easter Seals center, where physical therapy has helped her to begin walking.

"We're much better off now," the mother said. "If you don't do something when they are small and catch it at the beginning, it will be much harder in the long run."

All normal children lift their heads by the time they are a month old, usually earlier, according to the standard Denver Development Screening Test used by pediatricians.

Almost all babies can hold up their heads at a 45-degree angle by 2½ months. By three months, more than 80 percent of babies can hold their heads up perpendicular to their bodies.

It is normal for premature babies to be slightly slower than the norm.

Parents can watch for many other signals — that the child rolls over completely by five months, sits without support by eight months and is competent at walking forward by 15 months.

**Responding to a face:** But one of the infant's most revealing accomplishments is a smile.

"It tells you that a child can see, first of all," said Young. "It also demonstrates that the child recognizes the imprint of a human face and can, say, distinguish it from a door."

Almost all normal babies smile in response to oth-

### Watch your baby for these signs:

#### NORMAL DEVELOPMENT

- pushes up on arms
- holds head up



BY  
**3**  
MONTHS\*

#### DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEMS

- unable to lift head or push up on arms
- stiff legs



- pushing back with head
- constantly fisted hand and stiff leg on one side
- has difficulty moving out of this position

- sits with support
- holds head up
- straight back



BY  
**6**  
MONTHS\*



- unable to lift head
- rounded back
- stiff arms



- arms held back
- stiff, crossed legs

- sits without support
- arms free to reach and grasp



BY  
**8**  
MONTHS\*



- rounded back
- poor use of arms for play
- stiff legs, pointed toes

- poor head control
- has difficulty getting arms forward
- arched back - stiff legs



- poor ability to lift head and back
- will not take weight on legs

- pulls to stand



BY  
**12**  
MONTHS\*



- has difficulty getting to stand
- stiff legs, pointed toes



- cannot crawl on hands and knees
- uses only one side of body to move

- independent standing or walking



BY  
**15**  
MONTHS\*



- walks on toes on one side of body
- holds arm stiffly and bent
- tip-toes excessively when walking



- sits with weight to one side
- uses predominately one hand for play
- one leg may be stiff

\*90% of babies do this before these ages. Remember to correct your child's age for prematurity. Source: Pathways Awareness Foundation and the Illinois chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Barbara Kagan/Register

ers by two months. By five months, they smile on their own.

Babies usually make noises, other than crying, by two months, laugh by four months and squeal by five months, according to the Denver test.

Early help for children with developmental delays makes all the difference in the world, LaCamera said. "Studies have shown that delays in motor skills may affect other functions as well. If you knock over a few dominoes, others may fall too," he said.

**Team approach:** The Easter Seals center, a private non-profit agency, is one of several area facilities offering help. Experts there first evaluate children to find out if there is a problem.

If the child does have a developmental problem, a battery of specialists — including nutritionists, physical therapists and occupational therapists — move in

to help.

Early help means children can catch up faster, he said.

"If you start at 2 or 3 years old, rather than waiting until the child is 6, it costs half as much money to bring the child to the same level," LaCamera said.

Most severe developmental problems are inborn. Only the grossest neglect or abuse is likely to prevent babies from holding up their heads or walking, said Dr. Richard H. Granger, a professor affiliated with the Child Study Center at Yale and a pediatrician at Yale-New Haven Hospital.

**How to help:** But that doesn't mean that what parents do doesn't count.

Studies by Yale researchers in the 1950s found that

Turn to Babies, Page 24