

# WHAT'S UP DOC?

by Amy R. Beach, FNP

**Q:** What is normal speech development and when does it start?

**A:** Speech development actually starts in infancy. From birth to 6 months, an infant should react to sound, turn their head to noise, laugh, cry, and make noise when they are spoken to. From 6-11 months, they should begin to understand no, babble, communicate with gestures, and try to repeat sounds. Between 12 and 17 months, the child should be able to follow simple directions, point to objects and pictures, and begin trying to imitate sound. During the 18-23 month period, he or she should be able to point to certain body parts like "nose", have 8-10 words in their vocabulary, and correctly pronounce vowels and the letters n,m,p,and h. At 2 years, a child should know approximately 50 words and say 40 words. They may begin putting 2 words together to form simple phrases, and the speech becomes more accurate.

**Q:** What if my child is not meeting these milestones?

**A:** The first step in evaluation of a speech delay is a hearing test called an audiological evaluation done by an audiologist. If an infant is not babbling at all or turning their head to noise, this may be done early on. However, if a child seems to hear well but is not learning speech by 18-24 months, this maybe be done later. If hearing is normal but by age 2 the speech is still delayed, the child should be evaluated by a speech pathologist.

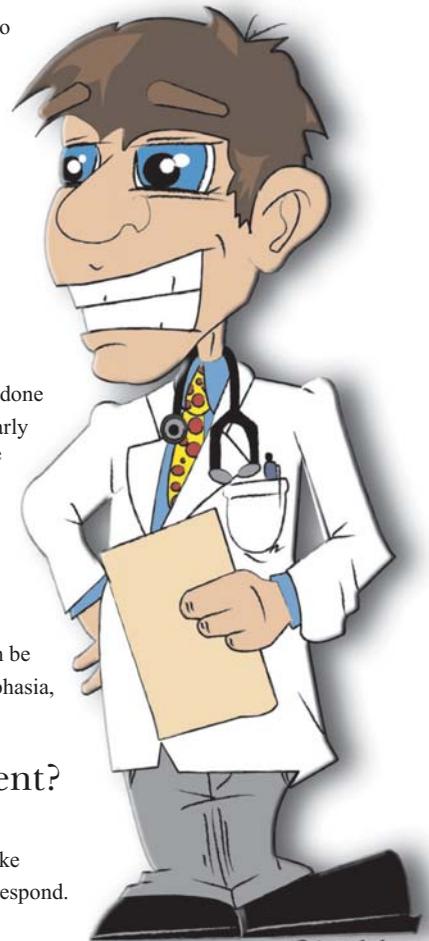
**Q:** What are the possible causes of speech delay?

**A:** Five-10% of children with a speech delay will have a developmental disorder. Other causes can be hearing loss, mental retardation, expressive language disorder, autism, selective mutism, receptive aphasia, cerebral palsy, and psychosocial deprivation.

**Q:** How can I encourage my child's speech development?

**A:** Begin talking to your baby as soon as he or she is born. Read aloud often. Play simple games like "peek-a-boo" and "patty-cake". Listen and look at your child when they talk and give them time to respond. Ask a lot of questions.

Speech delays are best treated when they are diagnosed early, so be sure and talk with your pediatrician if you have any concerns.



Brian Johnson

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