



## UNDERSTANDING CORRECTED AGE

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If your baby was born prematurely, you may have heard or read different terms about your baby's "age", especially when referring to development. You may have heard the words "corrected age" or "adjusted age" or "chronological age". This information sheet responds to some of the most frequently asked questions parents and family members have about premature infants and corrected age.

### What is chronological age? (actual age)

Your baby's chronological age is the number of days, weeks, months or years today is from his or her actual date of delivery, or birthday. This is the same method most of us use to calculate our own age. The chronological age is sometimes referred to as the "actual age".

### What is corrected age? (adjusted or post conceptual age)

Corrected age "corrects" for your baby's prematurity. Sometimes, you will hear it referred to as "adjusted age" or "post conceptual age". It is calculated by starting with the chronological age and subtracting the number of weeks of prematurity from that age. The formula is:

$$\begin{array}{rcccl} \text{(Chronological Age)} & - & \text{(Weeks or Months of Prematurity)} & = & \text{Corrected Age} \\ \text{(Actual Age)} & & \text{(Corrected Age)} & & \text{(Adjusted or Post} \\ & & & & \text{Conceptual Age)} \end{array}$$

For example, if your baby was born at a gestational age of 28 weeks, you probably know that she was 12 weeks premature (a term pregnancy is 40 weeks; simply subtract your baby's gestational age from 40 weeks to find the number of weeks of prematurity). If her actual age is 6 months, then her corrected age would be:

$$6 \text{ months} - 3 \text{ months} = 3 \text{ months}$$

### Why is corrected age used?

It is important to correct for a baby's prematurity to give an accurate assessment of his developmental abilities. When a baby is born early, his brain and the rest of his neurological system have not developed or matured to the same degree as a baby born at term.

If your baby had a gestational age of 28 weeks, her brain and the rest of her neurological system would need a full 12 weeks of growth before we would even expect her to function as a term newborn! Therefore, the developmental expectations of a premature baby are based on corrected age, rather than chronological age, as it would be for a "term baby". As the premature baby gets older, both the corrected and chronological ages are used as a guide in the developmental assessment.

## **How long is corrected age used?**

Many professionals working with premature infants will use corrected age until actual age reaches 2 to 2 ½ years. It is felt that this is generally the time most premature babies have “caught up” and there is little or no difference noted from a baby born at term. However, there is current thought that the amount of time your baby needs to “catch up” is directly related to how many weeks she was premature.

In some developmental clinics, a formula is used to give a more precise estimate of how long corrected age needs to be used when determining developmental abilities. This formula simply multiplies the number of weeks of prematurity by 10, to give the number of weeks needed to correct for prematurity. For example, if your baby was 12 weeks premature, we would correct for 120 weeks (12 x 10), or about 2 years and 4 months. As your baby approaches this time frame, it would be expected that his developmental skills would be comparable to children of the same age, no longer accounting for prematurity.

## **What can I tell my friends and family?**

Explaining corrected age or why your baby is “small” or “behind” can be tiresome and discouraging. Even when you feel confident your baby’s development is where it should be, questions and comments from well-meaning family and friends can make you feel frustrated or angry. You may even begin to doubt that your baby is doing as well as you were told.

Often it is helpful to respond to these questions or remarks by assuring the person that specialists are closely monitoring your baby’s development. These specialists carefully assess your baby’s developmental skills, taking into account prematurity and any health problems. If any concern regarding your baby’s development is identified, they would discuss it with you promptly and develop a plan to address that need.

It might help to remind family and friends that all babies develop at their own rate, and one area, such as motor skills, may develop faster than another area, such as speech. If there are still questions or concerns, you may contact the clinic for assistance or bring any family member or friend along with you to an appointment!