CHILD GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Growth is the increase in the physical size of the whole body or any of its part. A child grows in size, height and weight. Growth is measured in metres and kilograms.

Development is an increase in skill and complexity of function. A child is developing when he or she is making progress in what he or she does with his or her mind and body, such as holding up of the head, holding a toy, learning language, talking, etc.

Development in children is predictable and follows a definite pattern. It should be steady. Stages in child development include: pre-natal period (i.e. before birth), infancy and early and late childhood, puberty and adolescence.

Development first starts from the head and spreads all over the body. Therefore a child first gains control of the eyes then the head, followed by the arms, trunk and legs. Developmental changes are orderly and progressive in a normal child, although it differs from child to child; some develop fast and others slow.

Factors that Influence Development

There are majorly two factors that affect child development – heredity and environment.

Heredity is the tendency for a parent to transfer his or her characteristics to his or her child, e.g. colour of skin and eyes, shape of nose, etc. The units which bear heredity or the hereditary factors in our body cells are called *genes*.

Environment includes everything that is outside the child's body, e.g. love and care he or she receives, the family, feeding, toys, home surrounding, clothing, shelter, etc.

Areas of Development

Children develop in these areas – physical, mental, emotional, social and moral. They need adult attention all along the way in order to make the best of their development.

Stages in Child Development

In the first month, the head of the child sags and needs support. His hands are tightly fisted or curled. He sleeps most of the time, feeds and cries. He stares indefinitely at surroundings, as eyes do not focus. He can hear sounds.

In the second month, he weaves his arms about when lying on his back. He can turn his head towards the direction of sound. He may have a regular routine, such as sleeping all night.

In the third month, he looks at people and follows their movements with the eyes. Hearing is fairly developed. He smiles and enjoys colours and light. He can hold his head up slightly. He can hold an object placed in his hand, e.g. a rattle.

In the fourth month, he holds his head erect. He can smile and show excitement. Eyes can follow moving objects slowly. He can reach for his toes.

In the fifth month, he can reach for an object. He puts everything within reach into his mouth. He can pull dress over face. He sits with slight support. Birth-weight may be doubled and he can become selective in taste.

In the sixth month, birth-weight doubles. He recognizes constant members of the family. He sits without support and makes distinguishable sounds. His hand and eyes work more together. He may start teething (milk teeth).

In the 7^{th} – 8^{th} months, he sits confidently and can crawl. He use toys freely. He can transfer objects from one hand to the other. He may begin to associate words with people, ideas or objects.

In the 9^{th} – 12^{th} months, he crawls very well, stands holding on to objects. He gradually stands unaided. He takes his first steps. His birth weight triples. He understands some words and can say very few.