

Stages of Fetal Growth

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By Dr. Derek Conte

In the current political climate much controversy attends the new laws being proposed and passed by several states regarding abortion. The prevailing question has always been: "When is a developing fetus allowed to be aborted without it being called murder?", in which case it might not be. Others insist the question read this way: "When is a developing *BABY* allowed to be aborted without it being called murder?", in which case it would be. What is the dividing line, if one exists at all, where a baby/fetus reaches the point where it is protected by homicide laws? Does it all boil down to a single word or is it a lack of understanding? New legislation in several states pushes things further than ever before and the language and attitudes on either side of the issue have taken on very nasty tones and ugly, disturbing memes are thrown each way on social media.

I thought it would be useful to present here a technical description of the developmental milestones in the gestation of a human baby/fetus. We must strive to understand the things that are important to us and take the time to learn the subject, at least in a basic and unbiased way, in order for us to trust our position on any controversial subject. To help do this, I will use both terms, "baby" and "fetus", below in the description which could be found on hundreds of medical or scientific web sites, virtually without major variation:

In the first few weeks after fertilization of the ovum by the sperm and their initial multiplication, the baby's/fetus' cells begin to differentiate into the structures that will later be a well-defined newborn. By the third week, the beginnings of the nervous system appear as the "notochord". It is appropriate that the nervous system is first because it is the system that controls and regulates all others. (That's why chiropractic is so powerful. After all, we are primarily doctors of the nervous system, not the of the bones!)

By week four, blood cells are forming, the arm buds appear and a rudimentary heart begins to beat about 65 times per minute. In week five, leg buds and eyes begin to form as the brain enlarges. Ears and webbed fingers appear in the sixth week. In week seven, webbed toes, eyelids and the outer ears appear as the back straightens and the bones harden.

After eight weeks, the genitalia begin to differentiate, the arms can bend and the fingers are separate. In week nine, nails and teeth come. The toes separate and all the basic structures of the brain are now present. Week ten forms the nostrils, the chin, distinct genitalia, and the appearance of a human face and, in the next two weeks, eleven and twelve, the baby/fetus is fully-developed. Genitals are fully-formed and the sucking reflex is present, so the baby can suck their thumbs and open/close its fists --- all of this in a package of about four inches.

During months four and five, hair appears on the head and body, all major organs form, and mother can feel her baby's/fetus' movements, who now yawns, stretches and makes faces. Months six and seven bring a baby/fetus able to live outside the mother with functional lungs, fingerprints, toeprints and eyes

that open. The baby/fetus responds to sound and can now hiccup. Excitation brings movement, jerking, and changes in pulse rate. The hearing fully developed, Baby/fetus responds to sounds, light, and pain.

The next two months, eight and nine, are mostly dedicated to rapid brain development, body-growth and fat deposition. With all its senses well-developed, baby/ fetus can see, blink, grasp, suck and turn its head. It is now time for the baby/fetus to be born.

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