



Baby Reflexes

A 'reflex' is an involuntary action that your body carries out in response to an external event, without you even having to think about it. Your baby is born with a number of natural reflexes which we develop and reinforce during our swimming courses to help them learn to swim. There are three significant reflexes:-

Amphibian Reflex

This is the most basic of a newborns' reflexes and it causes the arms, legs and torso of your baby to move in spurts. Our techniques stimulate this reflex aiding the transition to conscious movement.

The 'Gag' Reflex

is a reflex contraction of the back of the throat that prevents objects from entering the throat except as part of normal swallowing and helps prevent choking. In this case the reflex provides a water tight seal to the lungs while your baby is submerged and this automatic response is eventually replaced by conscious breath holding.

The Diving Reflex

When baby has been under for more than 3 seconds and does not have their own breath control, this reflex leads to a redistribution of blood flow ensuring the 'key' organs i.e. the brain and heart, receive a steady supply of oxygen. The 'diving reflex' is perfectly natural and slowly starts to diminish from between 6-9 months of age. Over time this reflex turns into the 'dive response' which 'free divers' access to enable them to stay under the water for long periods of time.

We do not actively encourage the use of the dive reflex as it is a survival reflex and can cause panic in the baby.

Although babies have the ability to stay under the water for longer than 3 seconds it doesn't mean they want to. We aim to teach you as parents how to read your baby's cues and understand what they are saying to you with their body language and facial expression.



Other Reflexes:

- **Postural Righting Reflex** -Babies are not born with this reflex. It occurs around 5 months of age and is the reason your baby no longer want to 'float' on their back as they are trying to 'right' themselves to get the head in the upright position. The chin comes to the chest, the arms and the legs straighten upward.
- **Moro Reflex** The Moro reflex is often also called the startle reflex because it usually occurs when a baby is startled by a loud noise, sudden movement of the head, or temperature change, This reflex causes the baby to throw his/her head back, extends arms and legs out, cry, then pull the arms and legs back in toward a foetal position. A baby's own cry can also begin this reflex. It usually has gone by 3-4 months but can last up to around 5 to 6 months.
- **Tonic Neck Reflex** When a baby's head is turned to one side the arm on that side stretches out and the opposite arm bends at the elbow. This is often called the 'fencing' position. This reflex lasts about 6 months.
- **Grasp Reflex** Stroking the palm of the new-born's hand causes the baby to close his/her fingers in a grasp. The grasp reflex lasts only a couple of months and is strong in premature babies.
- **Rooting Reflex** This is activated when the corner of the new-born's mouth is stroked or touched. Baby will turn their head and open his/her mouth to follow and 'root' in the direction of the stroking. This helps baby find the breast or bottle and begin feeding.
- **Suck Reflex** Rooting helps the new-born become ready to suck. When the roof of the baby's mouth is touched the baby will begin to suck. This reflex does not begin until around week 32 of pregnancy and is not fully developed until around 36 weeks. Premature babies may have an immature or week sucking ability because of the early birth, C-section babies can also experience difficulty with the sucking reflex.
- **Spinal Galant Reflex** Occurs when the skin along the side of an infant's back is stroked, the infant will swing towards the side that was stroked. It is present at birth and fades between the ages of four to six months.