



Dear Mommy,
I can hear your voice.

Dear Mommy,

I can hear your voice.

You're probably surprised to receive this letter from me. I'm the person living inside of you, your fetus ('offspring'). I'm your child.

I'm a girl (sorry to ruin the surprise), but I don't believe I have a name yet. I've heard that others receive their names quite early: some as soon as their mom is aware there is a child inside and they can determine whether the child is a boy or girl. But others are named when they are delivered from the womb, such as my cousin, Darren, who aunt Delores thought was going to be a girl because of her 'woman's intuition.' And some, I've heard, but cannot believe, never get a name at all. I'm happy to trust you with a good name, but please don't call me Betsy, Barb, or Bernace.

There's a lot I want to talk to you about. I am your child, after all, and we generally like to talk! These letters are my way of speaking to you.

I think you should know a little about how I'm doing physically. Please be patient: what I'm about to tell you is rather complex stuff, but my letters after this one will be less scientific.

As you know, everything started out well; my dad's sperm fertilized your oocyte and formed a zygote. This fertilization (conception) produced me, also known as a diploid cell or primordium. My life from conception has been a continuous process, but fertilization was the critical point because that's when I, a new genetically distinct person, was formed. I existed from conception as a genetic unity when the combination of 23 chromosomes from each parent resulted in the 46 chromosomes in the zygote. I'd like to thank you both for providing me with the chromosomes needed for life. Please pass on my thanks to my dad.

My development has been nothing short of amazing. At around three weeks since your last menstrual cycle the sperm broke through the tough outer membrane of your egg and fertilized it. Days later the fertilized zygote (me) arrived in your uterus. I was a tiny ball (a blastocyst).

At about four weeks I was the size of a poppy seed. Like teenagers, I entered a pretty rough stage in my appearance at five weeks where I looked sort of like a tadpole, but your belly protected me from anyone making fun of my looks. My heart began to beat this week, which is amazing considering I'm about the size of a sesame seed. At six weeks, my nose, mouth, and ears took shape. I wonder whether I'll have a Greek or Roman or Aquiline nose or a bulbous tipped nose like you. My intestines and brain developed too, although my brain still has a long way to go and I'm really hoping I am not sensitive to gluten like you, mom.

Seven weeks was a major stepping-stone for me: my feet and hands emerged from my developing arms and legs, but I still had that unseemly tail. You were not aware of this, but at eight weeks I started moving due to my developing lungs. At this point I was about the size of a kidney bean. By nine weeks that embryonic tail thankfully disappeared, and this is when I started to gain weight quickly.

Around ten weeks signaled the completion of my most critical phase of development and, well, I'm happy to report that I'm looking a lot better these days than I was in those awkward weeks before. In fact, even my nails formed – a free pedicure of sorts! Eleven weeks was when I was almost fully formed. I basically do hot yoga most of the day inside of you, with kicking, stretching, and some hiccupping due to my developing diaphragm. But you didn't feel a whole lot at that point. If you're curious, I was about the size of a fig at eleven weeks – oh, and don't tell Grandma, but I think I'm left-handed.

At twelve weeks I was basically the Karate Kid. My reflexes kicked in and my fingers opened and closed: 'Wax on, wax off!' In the final week of your first trimester, my fingerprints were detectable and my skin showed my organs and veins. Can you believe that my ovaries contained more than two million eggs at this point?

Getting past the first trimester was a huge step for us: miscarriages usually happen in the first trimester, but are far less likely after that. I don't want to sound too confident, but I'm in a physically safer zone (for now). I hope you're feeling better now from your morning sickness and able to get back to your regular exercise routine. Remember, interval training is better than a constant jog. Test the limits of your heart (pun intended).


After my fifteenth week I could sense light; and entering my sixteenth week is perhaps when you might have felt me kick. Remember that avocado you had for lunch? Well, I was almost that size. Seventeen weeks was pretty cool for me. Besides my joints moving more freely, my skeleton, which was formerly soft cartilage, started to harden to bone. I went through a sporty phase at eighteen weeks. Like boys in high school, I did a lot of flexing and you may have felt these movements. And now I am nineteen weeks, 6.0 inches long and weighing in at about 8.5 ounces, the size of a peach.

My senses are all developing and one of my favorite things is happening now: I can hear your voice. Can you please keep talking to your friends and singing in the shower? And, wow, I really love it when you laugh; it's like a mini-earthquake in here when you do!

I can hear your voice.

Love,

...



I can hear your voice.

Love,

...