

means to describe the characteristics associated with the majority of children at periods when distinctive developmental changes appear and specific developmental tasks must be accomplished. (A **developmental task** is a set of skills and competencies specific to each developmental stage that children must accomplish or master to function effectively within their environment.) It is also significant for nurses to know that there are characteristic health problems related to each major phase of development. The sequence of descriptive age periods and subperiods that are used here and elaborated in subsequent chapters is listed in [Box 3-1](#).

Box 3-1

Developmental Age Periods

Prenatal Period—Conception to Birth

Germinal: Conception to approximately 2 weeks old

Embryonic: 2 to 8 weeks old

Fetal: 8 to 40 weeks old (birth)

A rapid growth rate and total dependency make this one of the most crucial periods in the developmental process. The relationship between maternal health and certain manifestations in the newborn emphasizes the importance of adequate prenatal care to the health and well-being of the infant.

Infancy Period—Birth to 12 Months Old

Neonatal: Birth to 27 or 28 days old

Infancy: 1 to approximately 12 months old

The infancy period is one of rapid motor, cognitive, and social development. Through mutuality with the caregiver (parent), the infant establishes a basic trust in the world and the foundation for future interpersonal relationships. The critical first month of life, although part of the infancy period, is often differentiated from the remainder because of the major physical adjustments to