

You and Your Pediatrician

Pediatricians: Child Health Experts

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Children have different health care needs than adults - both medical and emotional. In choosing a pediatrician, you can know that your child is being treated by an expert in children's health. Pediatricians are trained to prevent and manage health problems in infants, children, teens, and young adults. Older patients trust their pediatrician, because they have known one another for many years.

Training

To become trained in pediatrics, a doctor must take special courses for 3 or more years after medical school. This is called residency. After residency, a doctor usually takes a long, detailed test given by the American Board of Pediatrics. After passing the test, the doctor is a board-certified pediatrician. He or she gets a certificate that you may see displayed at the office. The doctor can then become a Fellow (or member) of the American Academy of Pediatrics (FAAP). All of this background prepares your pediatrician to manage your child's total health care needs, including:

- Growth and development
- Illnesses
- Nutrition
- Immunizations
- Injuries
- Physical Fitness

Your pediatrician will also work with you on other issues, such as:

- Behavior
- Emotional or family problems
- Learning and other school problems
- Preventing and dealing with drug abuse
- Puberty and other teen issues

Pediatricians also work with teachers and other adults in child care centers, schools, and after-school programs. If your child has a very special or complex problem, your pediatrician can refer him or her to another specialist for further help, if needed.

As your child grows

Your pediatrician can continue to be an important resource not only for illness or injury care, but for all sorts of health advice, including:

- Exercise
- Nutrition
- Being too thin or too heavy
- Emotional and behavioral problems
- Helping children cope with issues like divorce and death
- School or learning problems
- Family problems

Your pediatrician can respond to your teen's special needs and can offer advice and counseling on:

- Body changes during puberty

- Menstruation
- Growth and hygiene
- Coping and being happy with oneself and with others
- Substance abuse
- Dating and sexual issues
- Eating disorders
- Acne
- Birth control
- Violence and related problems
- Gang problems

When to call the pediatrician

You should always feel free to call your pediatrician's office, either during office hours for routine questions or at any time for an emergency. Call right away if you are worried about your child. Sometimes a parent feels there is a problem before symptoms actually show up. Always call and get proper medical advice. Realize, though, that sometimes your pediatrician may not be able to answer your questions without seeing your child first. When you are not sure whether to call, trust your instincts. Follow these suggestions to be sure the phone is beneficial for both you and your pediatrician.

Make the most of the phone. Your pediatrician may prefer that you call with general questions during office hours. Some offices even have special "phone-in" times. Before you call, have a pen and paper ready to write down any instructions and questions. You could easily forget some details, especially when you are worried about your child. Be ready to gather information about your child's health.

- *Take your child's temperature.* If your child has a fever, write down the temperature, the time you took it, and how (orally, rectally, ancillary).
- *Remind the doctor about past medical problems.* Do not expect your pediatrician to always remember your child's medical condition. He or she cares for many children each day and may not remember that your child has asthma, seizures, or some other condition.
- *Be sure to mention medications.* If your child is taking prescription medication or a nonprescription drug, tell your pediatrician.
- *Keep immunization records at hand.* These are especially helpful if your child has an injury that may require a tetanus shot or if pertussis (whooping cough) is in your community.

If possible, have your child near the phone when you call your pediatrician. An older child may be able to tell you where it hurts, and you will not have to go to another room for an answer about a rash, fever, or cut.

Routine and emergency calls Routine calls include questions about medicines, minor illnesses, injuries, behavior, or parenting advice. You will usually not need urgent care for a simple cold or cough, mild diarrhea, constipation, temper tantrums, or sleep problems. For these cases you may just need proper medical advice.

However, if your child has any of the following, call to find out if he or she needs to be seen right away:

- Vomiting and diarrhea that last for more than a few hours in a child of any age
- Rash, especially if there is also a fever

- Any cough or cold that does not get better in several days, or a cold that gets worse and has a fever
- Cuts that might need stitches
- Limping or is not able to move an arm or leg
- Ear pain or drainage from an ear
- Sore throat or problems swallowing
- Sharp or persistent pains in the abdomen or stomach
- Any fever in a baby younger than 3 to 4 months of age
- Fever and vomiting at the same time
- Not eating for more than a day

Emergency calls require your pediatrician's prompt attention. But it is best to know what to do before a problem occurs. Plan to learn basic first aid, including CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). During a scheduled checkup, ask your pediatrician what to do and where to go should your child ever need emergency medical care.

Call your pediatrician **immediately** if your infant or child has:

- Bleeding that cannot be stopped
- Poisoning
- Seizures
- Any trouble breathing
- High fever
- Head injury with loss of consciousness, vomiting, or poor skin color
- Blood in the urine
- Bloody diarrhea or diarrhea that will not go away
- Sudden lack of energy or is not able to move