

Vaccinations and medications

Vaccinations are routinely given from the age of two months in order to avoid serious diseases, and to prevent outbreaks and epidemics of these infectious diseases. These typically include: Diphtheria, Tetanus, Whooping cough, Polio, Hib, Measles, Mumps, Rubella (as the MMR jab), Meningitis C.

However, the use of vaccinations is becoming an increasing debatable issue, and it is important to weigh up the possible side effects. There is some conflicting evidence as to the efficacy and necessity of some vaccinations. As they are given at a very young age when the immune system is not yet fully developed, immunity can be undermined, predisposing the child to subsequent weakness and disease. Certainly, vaccinations should not be given to a baby who is already weak or ill. Medications, such as penicillin, tend to weaken the digestive tract, which leads to poor digestion, and a poor immune system – so should be avoided unless necessary. If you can, read both sides of the vaccination debate so you can make an informed choice.

Craniosacral therapy and children

Many common childhood complaints can be traced back to the shock and trauma of the birth process, which affect youngsters both physically and emotionally. As Craniosacral therapy addresses the physical and emotional effects of birth, it tends to be effective on a wide range of childhood complaints that may not respond to conventional medicine.

These include:

- colic
- poor sleep
- excessive crying
- hyperactivity
- restlessness
- digestive disturbances
- ear infections
- mucus congestion, recurrent ENT problems, tonsillitis
- torticollis
- bed wetting
- head banging
- dyslexia, dyspraxia, learning difficulties
- squint

About the author

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Healthy kids

advice on preventing and managing ill-health in children



Including information on

- Diet and exercise
- Managing an acute illness
- Recognising a more serious condition
- Vaccinations and medications
- Craniosacral therapy and children

Introduction

Just as a child's mental, emotional and physical states take time to fully mature, so does his or her immune system. As such, children can be more vulnerable to external influences, and can easily become sick. However, luckily children also have strong energy, so tend to recover quite quickly. Proper nutrition, exercise and a safe and loving home all help support a child's development and growing immune system. However, it is important to be able to recognise symptoms of a serious illness, as babies and children may not be able tell you what is wrong with them.

Diet and exercise

We all need fuel to power our bodies – and getting the right nutrition is even more essential for a growing child. Here are a few guidelines:

- Breast feed if possible
- Start mixed feeding at around 6 months, certainly not before 3 months
- Avoid raw foods for youngsters – they are more difficult to digest. Well-cooked grains and vegetables are best
- Only introduce 1 new food a day, and allow the child to become used to it
- Avoid junk and processed food, as well as cold, greasy and excessively sweet food.

It can be difficult to get children to eat well. As a child gets older, education is important – a recent survey clearly showed most children could tell the difference between healthy and non-healthy foods if taught. Allow children to enjoy treats in moderation, and set clear ground rules. Get kids to join in with meal preparation and avoid excess snacking, especially before main meals. Taking time out to eat together as a family not only encourages better eating habits, it also allows time for you to bond with your kids.

With children today spending more time physically inactive in front of the TV or playing computer games, instead of running around outside, obesity levels are rising, and children risk ill-health as they get older. Children enjoy spending time with their parents, so spend time doing physical activities with them. Also, remember that the earlier you start learning a sport, such swimming, the easier it can be. In fact, there is no 'minimum age' for swimming and many toddlers can swim before they can walk. As your child's role model, your lifestyle habits can translate into life-long habits – good or bad – for them.

Managing an acute illness

No child enjoys perfect health all of the time, and there are many different childhood diseases which vary in severity. Due to their stronger energy, children tend to experience more severe symptoms than most adults. When your child is ill, it's important to record their temperature and symptoms. Non-specific symptoms and signs are important early indicators of a serious underlying illness. Having this information will help if you need to speak to a doctor.

FEVERS

Fevers are common in children, however a fever is not an illness in itself – it's a sign that your child is fighting an illness. A fever is diagnosed when the rectal temperature is above 100.4°F (38.0°C), Oral 99.5°F (37.5°C), or Axillary (armpit) 98.6°F (37.0°C). When assessing severity, it is a child's behaviour and other symptoms that must be considered, except when very high (over 41°C). Monitor this closely, as a child's status can change rapidly.

If your child has a fever:

- Remove warm clothing
- Keep hydrated with plenty of fluids
- Don't worry if he/she isn't hungry. Try small amounts of food, and avoid fatty or heavy foods
- Keep your child rested, quiet, and comfortable, but let them move around if they want
- Monitor your child's temperature periodically and keep an eye on his recovery until he seems to be back to normal

While antibiotics are routinely prescribed for many illnesses, they can have a long-term negative impact. Constantly fighting infections with antibiotics never allows the child's immune system the chance to flex its muscles, and can lead to not only weakening of the immune system itself, but contributes to general antibiotic resistance. How well would you play football if you were never allowed to train?

In terms of over-the-counter medicines, while paracetamol is routinely used to help bring a fever down, **aspirin** should **never** be given to infants or young children due to its side effects. Be sure to carefully read and follow instructions on the label of any medicines. Various scientific studies have demonstrated a lack of evidence for their efficacy of over-the-counter cough and cold medicines, antihistamines, and expectorants for children. Usually it is best to let a non-serious illness follow its natural course. Before using any medicines on children, always weigh up the potential risks.

Recognising a more serious condition

Most conditions in childhood are relatively minor, however symptoms in children can change very quickly, and must be regularly checked. Listed below are the typical average ranges for a child's vital signs to check. All children are different, so these should be taken as a guideline only.

Age (yrs)	<1	2-5	5-12	>12
Pulse beats/min	110-160	95-140	80-120	60-100
Resp breath/min	30-40	25-30	20-25	15-20
Syst BP mmHg	70-90	80-100	90-110	100-120

OTHER THINGS TO CHECK FOR

Below are some indicators which can alert you to a more serious illness:

Temperature: under 35.5°C or over 39.5°C

Behaviour: irritable, unresponsive, drowsy, difficult to wake, no eye contact, glassy stare

Feeding: >50% intake, fatigue/sweating with feeds

Dehydration: reduced urine output

Circulation: pale, extremities cold or blue

Gastrointestinal: vomiting bile/blood, excessive vomiting or watery stools (more than 4 in 24 hrs), blood in stools

Risk factors: under 3 months old, chronic underlying disease, immune deficiency

Breathing: grunting, rapid rate, difficult, irregular, nasal flaring, exhausted

Dehydration: sunken eyes, reduced skin tone, dry mouth

Skin: rash, mottled, pallor, cyanosed (blue), severe bruising

Cry: persistent, inconsolable, weak, high-pitched

Consciousness: lethargic, unresponsive, only rousable to pain, confused or sees/hears things that aren't there

If a child doesn't improve within a few days, or worsens, seek medical attention. Other symptoms to watch for include:

- Frequent urination or pain and burning with urination
- Drooling and trouble swallowing
- New swelling, pain, or redness in one or more joints
- Severe neck stiffness or pain and fussiness, esp. with sensitivity to light (may be meningitis)
- Seizures (arms and legs jerk uncontrollably)
- Fever went away for more than 24 hours and then returned
- A fever or other serious illness lasting more than 72 hours