

CHILD HEALTH

The Healthy Child Programme

The Healthy Child Programme is a series of reviews, screening tests, vaccinations and information to support parents and help them give their child the best chance of staying healthy and well.

The Healthy Child team is led by a health visitor, who will work closely with your DOCTOR and local Children's Centre. The team includes people with different skills and experience, such as nursery nurses, children's nurses and Early Years support staff.

The programme will be offered to you in your DOCTOR's local clinic or Children's Centre. Appointments should be arranged so that both you and your partner can be there. Some reviews may be done in your home. The reviews are also an opportunity for you to ask questions and discuss any concerns you may have.

What if I need some extra help?

All families are different, and becoming a parent can be difficult for many reasons, including being a young parent, living on a low income, or having a child who is ill or disabled.

The Healthy Child Programme offers plenty of support for children and families who need it. Your health visitor will make sure that your child has an individual Healthy Child plan, which reflects your particular strengths, needs and choices.

The child health record

Shortly before or after your baby is born, you'll be given a Personal Child Health Record (PCHR). This is a way of keeping track of your child's progress. Wherever you are and whatever happens to your child, you'll have a record of their health and progress, which can be shared with health professionals.

When you visit a clinic, your DOCTOR or a hospital, your baby's healthcare professional will use the red book to record your child's weight and other measurements, vaccinations and other important health information.

You can also add information yourself. It's a good idea to record any illnesses or accidents and details of any medicines your child takes. You'll find it helpful to keep the developmental milestones section of the PCHR up to date and to fill in the relevant questionnaires before the review. Don't forget to take the book with you when you take your child for a review or vaccination. Also try to bring it if you have to go to accident and emergency (A&E) or a walk-in centre.

Your baby's general development

During your child's development reviews, your health visitor will ask you how your child is doing and about any concerns you may have. If your baby was born prematurely, their developmental age will be calculated from your original due date, not from the actual date they were born.

Your baby will usually be weighed regularly between the ages of one month and 13 months and at the time of routine vaccinations. If there's any concern about your baby's weight, they may be weighed more often. In general, your baby should be weighed no more than once a month when they're up to six months old, once every two months from six to 12 months, and once every three months when they're over the age of one.

Your child should have a development review at the following ages:

Baby development after the birth

Maternity services will support you with breastfeeding, caring for your new baby and adjusting to life as a parent.

Your baby will be examined and given a number of tests, including a hearing test. See Your baby's screening programme for more information about your child's tests.

Baby development by 14 days

A health professional, usually a health visitor, will carry out a new baby review. They'll advise you on feeding your baby, becoming a parent and how to help your baby grow up healthily.

Your baby should be weighed (naked) at birth and at five and 10 days old.

Baby development between six and eight weeks

Your baby will have several tests and a full physical examination by a health professional.

Baby development by at eight weeks, three months and four months

Your baby will be given their scheduled vaccinations. This is also an opportunity for you to raise any concerns you may have and to ask for any information you need. See the vaccination schedule for kids for more information.

If you have any worries at any other times, would like to know more about your or your baby's health or have your baby weighed, contact the team or go to a local child health clinic.

Baby development by one year

Your child will have a second full review, checking on areas including language and learning, safety, diet and behaviour. This is an opportunity for you and your partner to discuss any concerns you may have and to prepare for your child becoming a toddler.

Child development between 12 and 13 months

Within a month of your child's first birthday they will be given their next set of vaccinations: MMR, Hib/MenC and PCV. You will have the opportunity to discuss their progress or ask for information.

Child development between two and two-and-a-half years

Your child may have a third full health and development review. Again, this is a chance for you and your partner to ask questions and get ready for the next stage of your child's development.

This review will be carried out by a member of the Healthy Child team, usually a health visitor, nursery nurse or children's nurse. They'll encourage you to talk about how things are going and will listen to your concerns. The review might be at your local children's centre, DOCTOR surgery or at home. It's best if both you and your partner are there.

The review will cover:

general development, including movement, speech, social skills and behaviour, hearing and vision

growth, healthy eating and keeping active

managing behaviour and encouraging good sleeping habits

teeth brushing and going to the dentist

keeping your child safe

vaccinations

Child development at school entry (four to five years)

Your child will have a full health review. This includes having their weight and height measured and their vision and hearing tested.

Once your child reaches school age, the school nursing team and school staff will help support your child's health and development. They will work with you to make sure that they're offered the right vaccinations and health checks. They will give you advice and support on all aspects of health and wellbeing, including emotional and social issues.

Children's medicines

Medicines aren't always needed for childhood illnesses. Most illnesses get better by themselves and make your child stronger and able to resist similar illnesses in the future.

Paracetamol and ibuprofen are often used to relieve the discomfort caused by a high temperature.

Some children, for example those with asthma, may not be able to take ibuprofen, so check with your pharmacist, DOCTOR or health visitor.

Both paracetamol and ibuprofen are safe and effective. Always have one or both stored in a safe place at home.

Common painkillers for children

Don't give aspirin to children under 16 unless it's specifically prescribed by a doctor. It has been linked with a rare but dangerous illness.

If you're breastfeeding ask your health visitor, midwife or DOCTOR for advice before taking aspirin.

Paracetamol for children

If your child has a fever

Always contact your DOCTOR, health visitor, practice nurse or nurse practitioner if:

your child has other signs of illness as well as a raised temperature

your baby's temperature is 38°C (101°F) or higher (if they're under three months), or

your baby's temperature is 39°C (102°F) or higher (if they're three to six months)

Read more about treating a child's high temperature.

Paracetamol can be given to children over two months for pain and fever. Make sure you've got the right strength for your child. Overdosing is dangerous. Check with your pharmacist when you buy it, and read the label carefully.

Ibuprofen for children

Ibuprofen can be given for pain and fever in children of three months and over who weigh more than 5kg (11lbs). Check the correct dose for your child's age. Avoid ibuprofen if your child has asthma, unless advised by your DOCTOR.

Antibiotics for children

Children don't often need antibiotics. Most childhood infections are caused by viruses, and antibiotics only treat illnesses caused by bacteria, not viruses.

If you're offered a prescription, especially an antibiotic, talk to your DOCTOR about why it's needed, how it will help and whether there are any alternatives. Ask about any possible side effects (for example, whether it will make your child sleepy or irritable).

If your child is prescribed antibiotics always finish the whole course to make sure all the bacteria are killed off. Your child may seem better after two or three days, but if the course is five days, they must carry on taking the medicine. The illness is more likely to return if you don't finish all the antibiotics.

Child medicine dosages

Make sure you know how much and how often to give a medicine. Writing it in your child's Personal Child Health Record (PCHR or red book) may help you remember (see Checking your child's development for more information on the PCHR). If in doubt, check with your pharmacist or DOCTOR. Never give the medicine more frequently than recommended by your DOCTOR or pharmacist.

With liquids, always measure out the right dose for your child's age. The instructions will be on the bottle.

Sometimes, liquid medicine may have to be given using a special spoon or liquid medicine measure. This allows you to give small doses of medicine more accurately.

Never use a teaspoon as they vary in size. Ask your pharmacist or health visitor to explain how a measure should be used. Always read the manufacturer's instructions supplied with the measure, and always give the exact dose stated on the medicine bottle. If in doubt, ask the pharmacist for help.

If you buy medicines at the pharmacy:

Always tell the pharmacist how old your child is. Some medicines are for adult use only.

Always follow the instructions on the label or ask the pharmacist if you're unsure.

Ask for sugar-free medicines if they're available.

Look for the date stamp. Don't use out-of-date medicines. If you have any out-of-date medicines at home take them back to the pharmacy for safe disposal.

Only give your child medicine given to you by your DOCTOR, pharmacist or usual healthcare professional. Never use medicines prescribed for anyone else.

Keep all medicines out of your child's reach and out of sight if possible. The kitchen is a good place to keep medicines as it's easy for you to keep an eye on them there. Put them in a place where they won't get warm.

Children and bad reactions to medicine

If you think your child is reacting badly to a medicine, for example with a rash or diarrhoea, stop giving it to them and speak to a health professional.

Ask your pharmacist or health visitor for advice. Keep a note of the name of the medicine in your child's PCHR so you can avoid it in future.

Overweight children: advice for parents

If your child is overweight, there's lots you can do to help them become a healthy weight as they grow.

No diets!

Don't be tempted to put your child on a weight-loss diet. Forcing an overweight child to go hungry can backfire, making them crave food even more.

Your child's still growing, so try to maintain their weight while they continue to grow in height. This way they will grow taller without necessarily adding pounds, and their weight could move into a healthier range.

As a parent, it can sometimes be difficult to tell that your child is overweight. A child may not look particularly heavy to be overweight. And, because more children are becoming heavier at a younger age, we've become used to seeing bigger children.

There's a lot you can now do to help your child reach a healthy weight.

Research shows that children who achieve a healthy weight tend to be fitter, healthier, better able to learn, and more self-confident. They're also less likely to have low self esteem and be bullied. And they're much less likely to have health problems in later life.

As a parent, there's lots you can do to help your child become a healthier weight. Getting them to be more active and eat well is important. Here's lots of practical advice to help you.

Steps for success

Weight checks

Every so often, check whether your child is moving into a healthy weight range with our Healthy weight calculator.

Here are five key ways you can help your child maintain a healthy weight. You can read this whole page or click on the links below to go directly to the topic you want to know about:

Be a good role model

Encourage 60 minutes of physical activity a day

Keep to child-size portions

Eat healthy meals, drinks and snacks

Less screen time and more sleep!

Be a good role model

One of the best ways to instil good habits in your child is for you to be a good role model. Children learn by example. One of the most powerful ways to encourage your child to be active and eat well is to do so yourself.

Set a good example by going for a walk or bike ride instead of watching TV, or surfing the internet. Playing in the park or swimming with your children shows them that being active is fun, and it's a great way for you all to spend time together.

Any changes you make to your child's diet and lifestyle are much more likely to be accepted if the changes are small and involve the whole family. Here are 10 ways to get healthy as a family.

If you're not sure what activities you'd like to try as a family, use this What's your sport? tool to find out what you're best suited to.

Physical activity may be more appealing for your child if you do something as a family. Here are 10 ways to get active with your kids.

Ideas for getting children involved in switching to a healthier lifestyle.

Get active

Overweight children don't need to do more exercise than slimmer children. Their extra body weight means they will naturally burn more calories for the same activity.

All children need about 60 minutes of physical activity a day for good health, but it doesn't need to be all at once. Several short 10-minute or even 5-minute bursts of activity throughout the day can be just as good as an hour-long stretch.

For younger children, it can take the form of active play, such as ball games, chasing games like "it" and "tag", riding a scooter, and using playground swings, climbing frames and see-saws.

For older children it could include riding a bike, skateboarding, walking to school, skipping, swimming, dancing and martial arts.

Walking or cycling short distances instead of using the car or bus is a great way to be active together as a family – and you'll save money too.

Find out the amount and type of physical activity recommended for under-5s.

Find out the amount and type of physical activity recommended for children and young people aged 5-18.

Child-size portions

Try to avoid feeding your child over-sized portions.

There's very little official guidance on precisely how much food children require so you'll need to use your own judgement.

A good rule of thumb is to start meals with small servings and let your child ask for more if they are still hungry.

Try not to make your child finish everything on the plate or eat more than they want to. And avoid using adult-size plates for younger children as it encourages them to eat oversized portions.

It may also help if you encourage your child to eat slowly and have set mealtimes. You can use mealtimes as an opportunity to catch up on what's happened during the day.

Explain to your child how to get the balance of their diet right using the eatwell plate. It shows how much they should eat from each food group.

Knowing the calorie content of foods can be useful.

Eat healthy meals

Children, just like adults, should aim to eat five or more portions of fruit and vegetables everyday. They're a great source of vitamins, minerals and fibre.

Getting 5 A DAY shouldn't be too difficult. Almost all fruit and vegetables count towards your child's 5 A DAY including fresh, tinned, frozen and dried. Juices, smoothies, beans and pulses also count.

Discourage your child from having too many sugary or high-fat foods like sweets, cakes, biscuits, some sugary cereals and soft drinks. These foods and drinks tend to be high in calories and low in nutrients.

Aim for your child to get most of their calories from healthier foods such as fruit and vegetables, and starchy foods such as bread, potatoes, pasta and rice (preferably wholemeal). And switch sweet drinks for water.

Help your children avoid sitting and lying around too much as this makes them more likely to put on weight.

Limit the time your child spends on inactive pastimes like watching TV, playing video games and playing on electronic devices.

There's no hard and fast advice on how much is too much, but experts advise that children should watch no more than two hours of television each day. And remove all screens (including mobile phones) from their bedroom at night.

It also helps children stay trim if they sleep well. It's been shown that children who don't have the recommended amount of sleep are more likely to be overweight. The less children sleep, the greater the risk of them becoming obese. Lack of sleep can also affect their mood and behaviour.

How screens impair children's sleep.

Sleep tips for children.

Hidden causes of weight gain.

If your child has a medical condition then the advice in this article may not be relevant and you should check first with their DOCTOR or hospital doctor.

Vaccinations

There's a recommended timetable for routine childhood vaccinations. This timetable has been worked out to give children the best chance of developing immunity against common diseases safely and effectively, and doing it early enough to minimise their risk of catching these diseases.

When to start childhood vaccinations

Routine childhood vaccinations start when a baby is two months old. This may seem very young, but babies can catch diseases at any time, so the earlier we start the better. It's a good age to start vaccinations because the natural immunity to illness that newborn babies get from their mother begins to wear off (if a vaccine is given before two months of age, the baby's natural immunity to disease may stop the vaccine from working).

That's why you should ideally try to have your child vaccinated at the recommended time. Any delay can leave your baby unprotected against illnesses that are often more common and worse in younger children.

Vaccinations for premature babies

Babies who are born early can be at greater risk from infections than babies born on time. This is because their immune systems are less developed. Also, they don't receive as much natural immunity from their mothers.

It's especially important that premature babies get their vaccines on time, from two months after birth, no matter how premature they are.

It may seem very early to give a vaccination to such a tiny baby, but many scientific studies have shown that it's a good time to give them vaccines. Postponing vaccination until they're older leaves them vulnerable to diseases.

If your baby was born very prematurely (less than 26 weeks of pregnancy), they may still be in hospital when they're recommended to have their first vaccinations. In this case, your baby will receive their first jabs in hospital.

Booster jabs

Some vaccines are given more than once. The gap between these different doses of vaccines is to make sure that each dose has time to work effectively.

However, the recommended gap is only a minimum. If the gap is longer, for example, because you missed an appointment, you don't have to start the course again.

Vaccination for life

The childhood vaccination schedule tells you when each routine vaccination should be given. The schedule of vaccinations starts when your baby is two months old. It's normally completed by the time they're 18. Other non-routine vaccines may be needed throughout childhood, for example, for travel or for children with certain medical conditions.

Have a look at the schedule to make sure that your child is fully protected. Or use our interactive tool to print out a personalised vaccination wall planner to find out when your child's vaccinations are due.

Very overweight children: advice for parents

If your child is very overweight, there's lots you can do to help them become a healthy size as they grow.

Weight checks

Every so often, check whether your child is moving into a healthy weight range with our Healthy weight calculator.

If your child is very overweight, there's lots you can do to help them become a healthy weight as they grow.

Very overweight children tend to grow up to be very overweight adults, which can lead to health problems such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers.

Research shows that children who achieve a healthy weight tend to be fitter, healthier, better able to learn and are more self-confident.

They're also less likely to have low self esteem and be bullied.

As a parent, there's lots you can do to help your child become a healthier weight. Getting them to be more active and eat well is important.

Here's practical advice to help you.

Listen to your child's concern about their weight. Overweight children often know they have a weight problem and they need to feel supported and in control of their weight. Let them know that you love them, whatever their weight, and that all you want is for them to be healthy and happy.

Steps for success

Medical help

If your child is very overweight, or if they have other health conditions, it's a good idea to ask for support. See suggested support networks at the bottom of the page.

Here are five key ways to help your child achieve a healthy weight. You can read this whole page or click on the links below to go directly to the topic you want to know about:

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Any changes you make to your child's diet and lifestyle are much more likely to be accepted if the changes are small and involve the whole family. Here are 10 ways to get healthy as a family.

If you're not sure what activities you'd like to try as a family, use this [What's your sport?](#) tool to find out what you're best suited to.

Get active

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For younger children, it can take the form of active play, such as ball games, chasing games like "it" and "tag", riding a scooter, and using playground swings, climbing frames and see-saws.

For older children it could include riding a bike, skateboarding, walking to school, skipping, swimming, dancing and martial arts.

If your child isn't used to being active, encourage them to start with what they can do and build up to 60 minutes a day. They're more likely to stick to their new activity levels if you let them choose the type of activity they're comfortable with.

Walking or cycling short distances instead of using the car or bus is a great way to be active together as a family – and you'll save money too.

Child-size portions

Try to avoid feeding your child large portions.

A good rule of thumb is to start meals with small servings and let your child ask for more if they are still hungry.

Try not to make your child finish everything on the plate or eat more than they want to. And avoid using adult-size plates for younger children as it encourages them to eat oversized portions.

Beware of high-calorie foods. Calories are a measure of the energy in food and knowing how many calories your child consumes each day and balancing that with the amount of energy they use up in activity will help them reach and stay at a healthy weight.

Eat healthy meals

Children, just like adults, should aim to eat five or more portions of fruit and vegetables everyday. They're a great source of vitamins, minerals and fibre.

Getting 5 A DAY shouldn't be too difficult. Almost all fruit and vegetables count towards your child's 5 A DAY including fresh, tinned, frozen and dried. Juices, smoothies, beans and pulses also count.

Discourage your child from having too many sugary or high-fat foods like sweets, cakes, biscuits, some sugary cereals and soft drinks. These foods and drinks tend to be high in calories and low in nutrients.

Aim for your child to get most of their calories from healthier foods such as fruit and vegetables, and starchy foods like bread, potatoes, pasta and rice (preferably wholemeal). And switch sweet drinks for water.

Help your children to avoid sitting and lying around too much, as it makes it more likely for them to put on weight.

Limit the amount of time your child spends on inactive pastimes such as watching television, playing video games and playing on electronic devices.

There's no hard and fast advice on how much is too much, but experts advise that children should watch no more than two hours of television each day – and remove all screens (including mobile phones) from their bedroom at night.

It also helps children stay trim if they sleep well. It's been shown that children who don't have the recommended amount of sleep are more likely to be overweight. The less children sleep, the greater the risk of them becoming obese. Lack of sleep can also affect their mood and behaviour.

If you've received a letter about your child's weight after they were measured in school you can use the contact number on the letter to speak to a health worker and get more information about what you can do and what support is available in your area.

Your DOCTOR or practice nurse can give you further advice.