

Things You Should Know: Your Child at 3 Years

DIET

- It is normal for children this age to be picky eaters. This presents a challenge to get your child to eat healthy food from all five food groups every day. The best thing you can do is to keep healthy food in the house and offer it for meals and snacks. Offer a wide variety of foods and let your child decide the types and amounts. Limit the amount of fatty foods, salt and sugar. If junk food isn't around, they won't eat it.
- Your child needs 3 meals and 2 snacks a day. **Offer 3-4 servings of 1% or skim milk and 5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily.**
- **Avoid fast food and sugary drinks including soda, Kool-Aid, sports drinks and sweet tea. Limit juice to 4-6 ounces per day.**
- Your child should be feeding him or herself and using utensils.
- Children should not be fed nuts, hard candy or chewing gum because of possible choking.
- **Eat meals together as a family at the kitchen table.**

SLEEP

- **Three year olds need 10-13 hours of sleep per day.**
- Your child may stop taking naps. Children become more irritable when they are overtired, particularly after they discontinue naps, and may need help calming down. Switching from highly active play to a quieter activity may be helpful before bedtime.
- **Set a regular bedtime routine that allows your child ten or more hours of sleep each night.** You might consider an earlier bedtime when your child stops napping.
- It is not unusual for children this age to have bad dreams. If this happens, it is best to comfort your child in bed. Give reassurance that all is well, but don't fall into the habit of having your presence required for him or her to fall asleep.

DISCIPLINE

- Discipline is very important. **Every child needs structure and limit setting.** In fact, many children act out or misbehave to explore what their limits are. **By setting limits, you teach the child appropriate behaviors and show that you love and care.** Physical punishment, like spanking, may be effective, but often gives the child a message that physical violence and hitting are okay. Discipline should be humane, age-appropriate, time-limited and fair. Time out and removing toys or privileges are very effective in this age group. Time out should be one minute per year of age. Use this as a teaching tool. Ask if they understand why the behavior is unacceptable and then forget it after the time out is completed. Positive reinforcement and consistency are the keys.

SAFETY

- **ALWAYS use a car seat.** A seat belt alone is not safe for children this age. Be firm. Don't leave the driveway until all are buckled up, including you. Set a good example. See our Car Seat Guidelines handout for further details.
- Children should be taught the danger of chasing a ball or pet into the street. Your child must be closely supervised when near a street.
- Children should not play around hot liquids in the kitchen.

- Guns should be locked up and the ammunition stored separately. Knives should be stored out of the reach of children.
- Children this age should be taught to be careful around unfamiliar dogs, especially when the dog is eating.
- Children should be constantly supervised in and near water. Never leave your child unattended in the bathtub. Life jackets are critical when swimming in streams or lakes. Knowing how to swim does not guarantee the child's safety in water.
- Children this age are very curious about fire. Keep all matches, lighters, candles and cigarettes away from children. Install smoke detectors outside every bedroom and check the batteries frequently. Buy a fire extinguisher.
- Small children should not be allowed to play with plastic bags or balloons.
- Carbon monoxide detectors are recommended.
- **Talk about safe touch with your child.** Teach your child that no one should touch parts of the body that are covered by a swimsuit. Teach your child to tell you if he or she is touched in a way that is unpleasant.
- Poisoning is still a concern. Medications, cleaners and hazardous chemicals should be kept out of sight and reach of children and in a locked cabinet. The Poison Control number should be kept readily available. **1-800-366-8888.**
- **Use sunscreen when your child will be exposed to direct sunlight. Purchase a sunscreen that is "broad spectrum" with at least an SPF of 15. Apply the sunscreen 15-30 minutes before going outside.**
- Teach your child good hand washing.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

- Most children are potty trained by 4 years of age.
- Bedwetting is very common in children up to 5-6 years. Daytime wetting accidents are not as common and may be a sign of urinary tract infection. There are a few things you can do to help prevent nighttime accidents. First, limit the amount of fluids that your child drinks in the evening (nothing to drink after supper except sips of water). Second, take the child to the bathroom before he goes to bed and, if you like, before you go to bed. **Do not punish the child for nighttime accidents.** You may include your child in cleaning the soiled laundry, but do not be negative.
- **Schedule an appointment with a dentist. Your child needs to visit the dentist every six months. Help your child brush 2 times a day with a small amount of fluoride toothpaste.**
- At three years of age your child's speech should be 75% understandable to others.

PARENTING PRACTICES

- **Read to your child every day** and talk about the pictures and stories.
- Each parent should spend some time alone with each child every day.
- **Provide opportunities for daily physical exercise.** Try family exercise such as walking, swimming or bicycling (with helmet).
- Provide experiences outside the home to help your child explore and develop social skills such as sharing and taking turns.

- **Limit TV time to no more than 2 hours per day.** Do not put a television in your child's bedroom.
- It is important to show affection.
- Parents should never threaten to leave or abandon their child.
- At this age children may be curious about where babies come from and about the differences between boys and girls. Parents should be prepared to answer these questions honestly, at a level appropriate to the child's understanding. Children are very honest in expressing their need to know. They will ask questions until their curiosity is satisfied. Parents should use correct terms for the genitalia and understand that the child's sexual curiosity and explorations are normal.
- **A drug-free, alcohol-free and tobacco-free environment is essential for your child.**

IMMUNIZATIONS AND WELL CHILD VISITS

- At the 3 year old visit your child will be checked for lead and anemia.
- The nurses and doctors will check your child's shot record at the beginning of the visit and will be able to identify if any immunizations are needed.
- Your child continues to need yearly well child exams.
- Yearly Flu and COVID-19 vaccines are recommended.

Do not hesitate to call or text the office with any questions or concerns!