



# Well-Child Care — a Check-Up for Success

By Tracy A. Mozingo

**You visit the pediatrician when your child is sick, but well-child care is an important part of keeping children healthy, too.**

**T**aking your child to the doctor for an allergic reaction, an ear infection, or labored breathing is only one type of visit. When I take Josh, my 1-year-old son, to the pediatrician, I'm relieved when the visit is one of his well-baby check-ups. Many parents view this well-child visit as a time for scheduled vaccinations and to see how much your child has grown in the past few months.

However, well-child care also is a chance to raise questions and concerns about your child's development, behavior, and general well-being — questions that are difficult to discuss during sick visits. For instance, pediatricians are used to discussing common concerns with parents such as eating, sleeping, toilet training, social behaviors, as well as attention and learning problems. Having regular well-child visits with your child's doctor and raising the concerns that matter most to you are key ingredients in helping the doctor know you and your child, and in forming a reliable and trustworthy relationship. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Department of Research recently conducted 20 focus groups with parents and 31 focus groups with pediatricians and pediatric nurse practitioners to gather recommendations about how to make the most of the well-child office visit. From these sessions, four themes emerged:

- **Pediatricians and parents share the goal of healthy children.**
- **Pediatricians want the well-child visit to best serve the needs of children and their families.**
- **Pediatricians are experts in child health, but parents are experts on their child.**

- **A team approach can best develop optimum physical, emotional, and developmental health for the child.**

## **Making the Most of Doctor Time**

"In our study that included parent and pediatrician focus groups, we found that both groups felt an ongoing, continuous relationship between family and pediatrician was a first requirement for high quality care," said Lane Tanner, M.D., FAAP, associate director, Division of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics at Children's Hospital and Research Center in Oakland, Calif. "That continuity of care helps build trust, and that can lead to better communication at the well-child visit."

Creating a list is another way to ensure you get all the information you need. Jotting down three to five questions and bringing them to the visit will help you focus on your issues of concern and start the dialogue with your pediatrician.

"Any question that reflects your concern about your child's development, behavior, sleep, eating or relations with other members of the family is appropriate," suggested Martin T. Stein, M.D., FAAP, professor of pediatrics at the University of California San Diego Rady Children's Hospital. "Asking what you can do to help your child's development and learning is probably the best question."

Other ideas include researching Web sites, pamphlets, and books that describe age-specific developmental skills and typical issues your child may be experiencing. Knowing what to expect makes the new feel more familiar (and less scary).

"Talk to others who may care for your child — the other parent, a grandparent, child caregiver — and ask for their input.

They may notice something different to offer a new perspective,” Dr. Stein offered.

According to Dr. Tanner, parents shouldn’t hesitate or feel embarrassed to share information that further opens the doors of communication. “As your child’s most important advocate, you have valuable information that will help your doctor better understand your child and your family,” he said.

### An Ounce of Prevention ...

Immunizations are a big part of the preventive care visit, but talking about other topics can be helpful. Pediatricians also address safety in the home and at the playground, optimal nutrition, toilet training, and environmental concerns such as lead paint exposure.

A lot of first-time parents like me may not realize that they can ask about any and everything related to the care of their child — medical or not.

“I recommend talking about what you see as either a special trait or a concern about your child,” Dr. Stein explained. “This helps your pediatrician get to know you and your child on a more personal level. And pediatricians also like to know how much you

appreciate their care. This helps build a stronger bond with your family. We can all use positive feedback!”

### A Healthy Future

The AAP developed a set of comprehensive health supervision guidelines for well-child care, called Bright Futures, for pediatricians to follow. Its mission is to promote and improve the health, education, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, families, and communities.

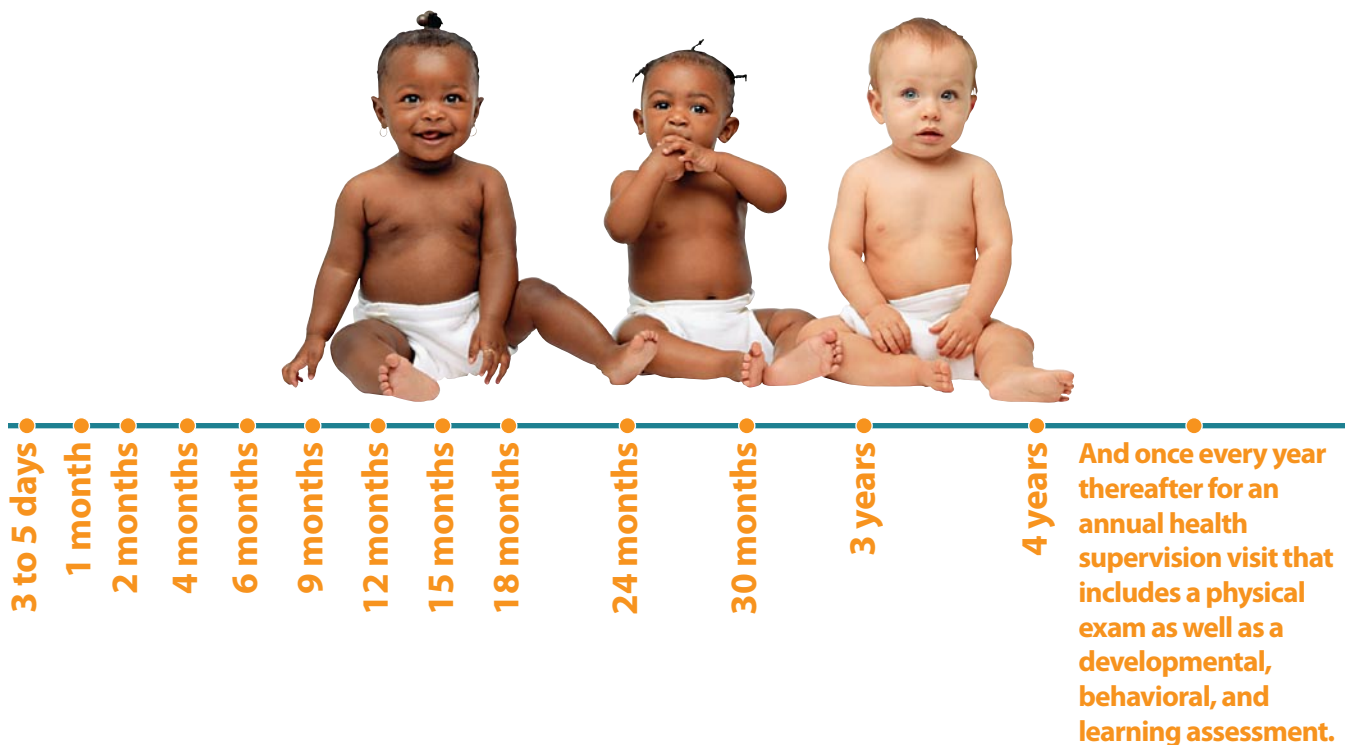
Some pediatricians send out reminder cards for these planned appointments, much like dentists’ offices do for semiannual cleanings. This was one of the recommendations that emerged from the focus groups.

“Well-child care is so important,” stresses Dr. Tanner. “Taking your child to the doctor when he or she is feeling under the weather is simply not enough. The AAP recognized the need for a schedule of visits to the pediatrician because when you know a visit is approaching, you can prepare for topics of discussion. Starting the dialogue can lead to a healthier life for your child overall, and that is the ultimate goal.”

For a complete schedule of recommended well-child visits, see the “Schedule of Well-Child Care Visits” below. ●

## Schedule of Well-Child Care Visits

Visits can include physical measurements, patient history, sensory screenings, behavioral assessments, and planned procedures (immunizations, screenings and other tests) at the following suggested intervals:



Source: American Academy of Pediatrics’ Bright Futures Recommendations for Pediatric Preventive Health Care 2008

## Make Time for a Medical Home

A medical home is the place where you put your primary trust in your child's healthcare.

Simply put, it's the pediatrician's office where you take your child for continuing healthcare. Your child's complete records are on file here, and you can find help for all other healthcare services including referrals when needed.

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, a medical home provides primary care that is accessible, continuous, comprehensive, family-centered, coordinated, compassionate, and culturally effective. The goal is to provide good preventive care for children, to make sure they get the most appropriate treatment based on their health history. For children who have chronic conditions, such as asthma or diabetes, this is particularly important.

You can learn more about the medical home at [www.medicalhomeinfo.org](http://www.medicalhomeinfo.org).

