

Keys to Great Parenting

Fun and Learning with Your Baby or Toddler

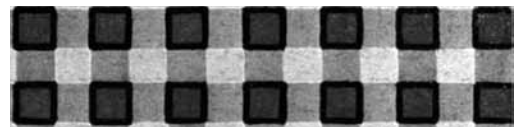


Cooperative Extension Service
University of Kentucky
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in partnership with

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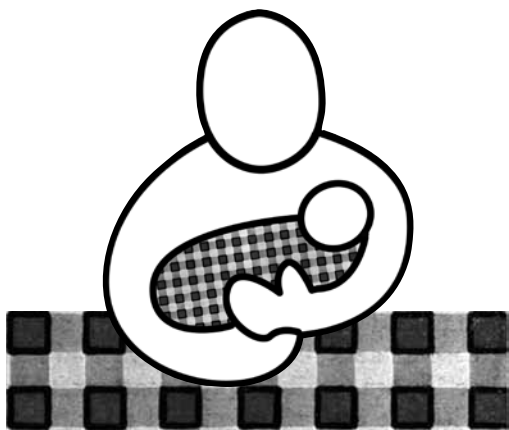


Practice Health and Safety

It is amazing how fast your baby develops during the first year of life. Though every baby grows at an individual rate, babies usually double their birth weight by the age of 5 months and triple it at about 1 year. They can gain their birth length half again by the end of their first year.

As babies grow into toddlers, they keep gaining strength, weight, and height. By age 2, most children weigh about four times as much as they did at birth. The rate slows as children move into their preschool years. They gain on average about 2 to 3 inches in height and 5 pounds in weight each year. However, remember that individual children vary in their rate of growth.

Our babies and toddlers count on us to keep them strong and safe as they move and explore. Around age 3, their brains are 2½ times more active than the brains of adults. This age is the best time to begin teaching children to take good care of themselves. This seventh key—**Practice Health and Safety**—offers specific things you can do to help make your child's life as healthy and safe as possible.



Health Tips

Here are some guidelines that can help you prevent many health problems and most accidents:

- Find and work with a health care professional you like to help you focus on keeping your child in the best health possible.
- Take your child outdoors each day. Fresh air, even when the temperature is chilly, is important for his physical health, brain development, and good spirits. Take your toddler to safe places where he can walk, run, and explore freely.
- Get rid of secondhand smoke. It can reduce the amount of oxygen in your baby's lungs, making it harder for him to breathe and reducing his energy. Secondhand smoke also is a strong risk factor for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). It also may reduce your child's ability to learn. 
- Wash your baby's hands and your own hands often. It is the most important way to help prevent the spread of infection. Teach your toddler to wash his own hands.
- Kill germs on surfaces, wooden toys, and hard plastic toys by wiping them with a safe-for-babies disinfectant. Allow the disinfectant to air dry. Wash soft cloth toys in detergent and hot water.
- Do not put your baby to sleep with a bottle. Instead, hold him when you feed him. Letting him hold juice, milk, or formula in his mouth over a long period of time could cause tooth decay.
- Remove your cat's litter box to an off-limits room. Children can get sick by coming in contact with contaminated cat feces.
- Make sure your baby or toddler gets enough sleep with no interruptions. (Sleep time should be kept peaceful.) Most toddlers are so active that they need 10 to 12 hours of sleep each night plus one to two hours of sleep at nap time, but some babies need more sleep than others. Also remember that the place where your child sleeps should be clean.

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- Take care of those beautiful new baby teeth. They are needed for chewing, holding space for permanent teeth, learning to speak clearly, and correct growth of the jawbone. Feed your child nutritious foods and give him plenty of water treated with fluoride.

With a small wet washcloth, gently wipe your baby's gums. Starting at about 15 months, brush your toddler's teeth twice each day with a soft toothbrush.

Beginning at 2 to 2½ years, take your child to the dentist twice a year. You will help your child begin early in life to avoid cavities and gum disease. It is a great gift.

- Do not use baby walkers. Walkers can get in the way of a baby's physical development, causing spine and balance problems. Walkers also cause a high number of injuries.

Good Nutrition

It is important to follow your health care provider's recommendations for feeding your baby or toddler. Here are a few suggestions from nutrition specialists:

For babies from birth to 4 months: Although infant formula supplies needed nutrients and offers flexibility, health authorities recommend that you breast-feed your baby if at all possible. Why?

- Human milk contains protein and fat, which are easier than commercial formulas for babies to digest.
- Babies develop greater resistance to infections and diarrhea with breast-feeding.

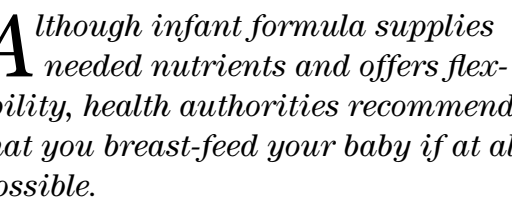
- Breast-feeding is a factor in preventing SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, also called crib death).
- It is easier for the baby to signal when she has had enough.
- Breast-feeding helps a mother's body, especially the uterus, to recover from pregnancy and birth.

For babies 4 to 12 months: Begin feeding semi-solid food no earlier than at 4 to 6 months because:

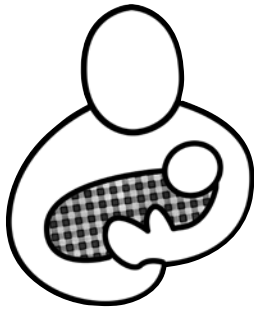
- Up to the time babies are 4 to 6 months old, breast milk or infant formula plus nutrients stored in their bodies at birth provide all that babies need for growth.
- Before they are 4 to 6 months old, babies' digestive systems are not ready for solid foods.
- The jaw and throat muscles of babies need time to gain strength and coordination to handle solid foods.

Here are some guidelines for beginning solid foods:

- Offer one new food for a few days before starting another one so you can check for allergies.
- Begin first with single grain cereals mixed with breast milk or formula.
- At 6 to 8 months, add strained vegetables, then strained fruits and 100-percent fruit juices.
- At 9 to 12 months, add strained meats, poultry, and chopped foods. Add citrus juices and eggs after 12 months.
- Stop feeding your baby when she turns her head away, holds her lips closed, or begins to play with her food.



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For toddlers: Every day, offer your child a balanced diet, including nutritious snacks. Here are other tips:

- Make sure your child drinks plenty of water. It is very important for the health of your baby or toddler.
- When your child reaches age 1, give her daily chances to feed herself, even though she may be messy. She will learn eating skills by practicing and imitating adults.
- Put small portions of food on the plate. Your child's stomach is quite small. A general rule is one tablespoon of each type of food for every year of a child's age. Let her ask for more!
- Give your toddler a few choices of nutritious foods. She will feel important when she has some say in what she eats.
- Your toddler may refuse a favorite food for a time or may insist on eating one food again and again. This behavior is natural. Be good humored, allow "food jags," and gently keep offering a variety of nutritious foods.
- Give your child time to try out a new food. Offer it as many as 10 to 12 times over a few months to encourage her to accept it.
- Sit calmly and talk with your child as she eats. Use words that describe the color, taste, and texture of foods.

Safety Tips

Get down on the floor and crawl around in each room of your house. Look for hazards and curiosities that you probably would investigate if you were your child.

In general:

- To help prevent electrical injuries, insert plastic covers on all electrical outlets in your home. Remove all extension cords from your child's reach. Sucking or biting a connected cord or socket can cause severe mouth burns.
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- To help prevent burns, adjust your hot water temperature to 120 degrees Fahrenheit or less. Check the water temperature with your wrist or elbow before putting your child in the water.
 - To help prevent choking, remove toys and other objects small enough to fit in a toilet paper tube.
 - Place expansion-type safety gates across open stairs and off-limits areas. Avoid using accordion-style wooden gates. Toddlers' heads can become caught in the spokes, and they can strangle.
 - Reduce clutter to help prevent falls. Pick up toddler toys often and encourage other family members to pick up their belongings, too.
 - Keep blind and curtain cords high, out of your child's reach. Make sure he cannot reach the cord from his crib.
 - Place houseplants out of reach. Some of them are poisonous.
 - Check the safety of your windows to help prevent your child falling out. You should open windows from the top only.
 - Place your purse or briefcase out of your child's reach. Items that could cause choking, cutting, or poisoning include cosmetics, medicines, and small objects such as paper clips and jewelry.
 - Do not let your child play with your car keys. They are covered with oil and bacteria.

In the bedroom:

- To reduce the risk of SIDS (crib death), put your young baby to sleep on her back rather than on her stomach.
- Place a firm, tight-fitting mattress in the crib to help keep your baby from smothering. Remove all soft items from the crib for the first 12 months. Do not use a waterbed, sheepskin, or pillow for a bed.
- To help prevent strangling, make sure the width between the slats on your baby's crib or wooden playpen is $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches or less.
- When your baby is able to pull up to sit or stand, remove hanging toys from the crib to help prevent strangling.
- To help prevent falls, keep one hand on your baby or toddler at all times when you are diapering him.

In the bathroom:

- Children can drown in 1 inch of water. When your child is in the bathtub, near the toilet, or near a bucket of water, watch him all the time.
- To help prevent slipping, place rubber mats in your bathtub and shower.
- Store medicines, vitamins, personal care items, and electrical appliances in out-of-reach or locked cabinets. Check for safety caps on all containers.



In the living room:

- Arrange your furniture to allow a safe, open space for rolling, creeping, crawling, and toddling. Remove to an off-limits room furniture that could tip over easily.
- Remove exposed or hanging electrical cords to help prevent stumbling, strangling, and burns.
- Put screens or other barriers around fireplaces, space heaters, or wood stoves.
- If you use a toy chest, remove the lid to help prevent the risk of head injuries or suffocation. Plastic see-through tubs on low, open shelves are a much better way to store toys.
- Repair or throw out broken toys or those with sharp edges.
- Install cushioning pads on sharp corners and of furniture edges to help prevent cuts and bruises from falls.

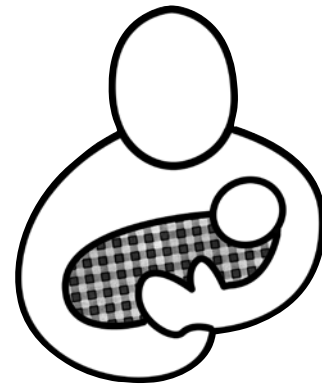
In the kitchen:

- Keep your child nearby but playing out of your way by stocking a floor-level cupboard with pots, bowls, and plastic utensils. She can fill, empty, stack, nest, bang, and stir.
- Place items like sharp knives and cleaning products out of reach. Keep products in the containers they came in so it is clear what they are.
- Put pots and pans on the stove's back burners with their handles turned toward the center of the stove. Place electric appliances far back on the counter top. Keep cups of hot beverages out of reach.
- Place your baby in a sturdy high chair with a wide base. Buckle her in at all times with a belt across her waist and between her legs. The tray should lock firmly in place. Never let your baby stand up in the chair. Keep her where you can see her at all times.



In your car:

- Protect your infant or toddler—and obey the law—by always properly using an approved safety seat. Carefully read the manufacturer's instructions to make sure the seat is installed correctly. Safety seats dramatically reduce injuries and deaths.
- Your safety seat should have a label showing it is approved under U.S. Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards.
- Make sure the seat is right for your child's size and age:
 - Use a safety seat for an infant facing to the rear or a safety seat that is convertible (so the child may face either to the front or rear) until he weighs at least 20 pounds and is 1 year old.
 - If your child is between 1 and 4 years old and weighs between 20 and 40 pounds, use a front-facing convertible seat in the upright position.
 - When your child reaches age 4 and weighs at least 40 pounds, he should sit in an approved booster seat.
 - If the car is equipped with front, passenger-side air bags, place all children under 13 in the rear seat, preferably in the middle.



Ensuring your child's health and safety protects him and gives you peace of mind. At the same time, you are teaching lifelong habits of good health, nutrition, and safety. You are indeed your child's first and most important teacher. The gift of a strong body is one more way of showing your love.

This publication provides information about good parenting. Readers are encouraged to use it for education but not as a substitute for other professional advice.

Original edition was prepared by Carole Gnatuk, Ed.D., Child Development Specialist, and Sam Quick, Ph.D., Human Development and Family Relations Specialist, Emeritus. Contact for current revised edition is Carole Gnatuk, Ed.D., cgnatuk@email.uky.edu.

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Prepare for Emergencies

In spite of our best efforts, emergencies can happen. Here are some ways to prepare:

- Find a class where you can learn or review cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first-aid procedures.
- Post emergency telephone numbers next to your phone. The list should include 911 and phone numbers of the poison control center and the hospital emergency room.
- Keep first-aid items handy.
- Regularly inspect your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Replace worn-out batteries.

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Keys to Great Parenting Web Site

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Kentucky Invests in Developing Success

Practice Health and Safety

This publication is No. 7 in a seven-part series on fun and learning with your baby or toddler, an educational program based on seven keys to unlocking your child's wonderful abilities:

- 1 Care for Yourself
- 2 Cuddle, Talk, and Read with Your Child
- 3 Know How Your Child Develops
- 4 Be Playful with Your Child
- 5 Show Your Child the World
- 6 Teach Self-Control
- 7 Practice Health and Safety

