

# Caring for your child: 4 years

## Feeding your child

- Include your child in family meals. Have a pleasant conversation at mealtime with TV off.
- You decide when and what your child eats. Let your child decide whether and how much to eat.
- Serve your child nonfat or low-fat dairy products, including milk, yogurt, and cheese (2 to 3 servings per day).
- Offer your child 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
- Ask the doctor whether your child needs vitamins or other supplements.
- Avoid fruit drinks, soda, chips, fast foods, and sweets.
- Don't bribe or reward your child with food.

## Practicing healthy habits

- Limit TV, video, and computer time to one hour per day. Avoid programs and games with violence or sex.
- Help your child brush their teeth twice a day and floss once a day.
- Schedule visits to the dentist every 6 months.
- Encourage daily physical activity with the whole family.
- Protect your child from sun exposure with protective clothing and sunglasses. Use sun block (SPF 15 or higher) on your child before they go into the sun. Repeat every 2 hours. Buy new sunscreen once a year. It loses its effectiveness after 12 months.
- Don't let anyone smoke in your home or car. Smoking around children increases their risk of ear infections, asthma, and pneumonia.

## Keeping your child safe

- Make sure your child wears a bicycle helmet that fits properly whenever riding a bike or scooter. Bike helmets also provide protection for other sports such as inline skating and skateboarding. For these sports, add wrist guards, kneepads, and gloves. Always supervise your child's play when near streets and driveways.
- Use a car seat for every ride. Be sure that it is properly installed in the back seat, which is the safest place for children. If your vehicle doesn't have a back seat that will allow a car seat to be safely installed, make

sure to turn off the passenger side front airbag. Front seat airbags have been involved in the deaths of some children and small adults. For information on choosing the safest seat for your child, call toll-free **1-800-282-5587** or visit **www.800BUCKLUP.org**.

- Watch your child constantly when they are around water. Make sure they wear a life jacket at all times near water.
- Keep the number of Poison Control, **1-800-222-1222** (voice and TDD), near your phone.
- If your child is in a home that has a gun, make sure that it is unloaded and locked up.
- Teach your child not to accept anything from strangers and not to leave with strangers.

## Understanding healthy weights

You may wonder if your child is too thin or too heavy. Children come in all shapes and sizes and grow at different rates. There are no ideal weights for children as they grow. Your doctor or other medical professional can help you decide if your child's weight is healthy.

Follow these steps to help your child have a healthy weight.

### Encourage your child to be active

- Encourage active play for 60 minutes or more every day. Plan family activities, such as trips to the park, walks, bike rides, swimming, and gardening.
- Limit time with TV, computer, and video games to one hour a day. Research shows that the more time children spend at these activities, the greater the chance that they will be overweight.
- Don't allow TV in your child's bedroom.
- Avoid using TV, the computer, or video games as a babysitter.

### Encourage healthy eating habits.

- Make healthy foods available to all family members, and eat meals together as a family as often as possible.
- Offer your child 3 meals and 2 snacks every day.

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- Serving sizes for children are not the same as for adults. A serving size for your child is what will fit into the palm of their hand.
- Offer at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
- Serve nonfat and low-fat dairy products and whole grains (rice, pasta, and whole wheat bread) at every meal.
- Don't pressure your child to eat everything on his or her plate.
- If your child decides not to eat a meal, wait until the next snack or meal to offer food.
- Check with your child's school or daycare to make sure that healthy meals and snacks are available.
- Don't use food as a reward.
- Limit foods and drinks that are high in sugar and fat.
- Avoid sodas, fruit drinks, and fast foods.
- Remember, you control what foods are in the house.

#### **Help your children feel good about themselves.**

- Give your child lots of love and attention.
- Let your children know that you love them whatever their size.
- Avoid teasing or nagging about weight, and don't refer to your child as skinny, fat, chubby, etc.

#### **Other parenting tips**

- Show affection. Play and have fun with your child.
- Tell your child not to let anyone touch them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable, and to let you know right away if that happens.
- Read stories with your child every day.
- Praise good behavior. Don't yell or spank. Use time outs instead. Apply rules fairly and in the same way every time.
- Your child learns from watching and listening to you. Be a good role model.

#### **Getting your child ready for kindergarten**

Children start kindergarten between 4½ and 6 years old. It can be hard to know exactly when your child is ready for school, and your local elementary school or preschool can help. Most children are ready for kindergarten when they have these skills:

#### **Behavior**

- Keeps hands to themselves while in line.
- Sits and focuses attention for at least 5 minutes.
- Sits quietly while listening to a story.
- Participates in clean-up activities.
- Uses words to express frustration rather than acting out.
- Works with other children in small groups.
- Completes an assigned task.
- Dresses self and uses bathroom without help.

#### **Coordination**

- Jumps.
- Pedals a tricycle.
- Throws and catches a ball.
- Holds a pencil correctly.
- Cuts with scissors.
- Copies or traces a line and circle.

#### **Language and math**

- Able to spell and write first name.
- Completes 2-step directions ("do this and then do that").
- Converses with other children and adults.
- Sings songs with a group.
- Counts from 1 to 5.
- Identifies 2 objects as large or small.
- Understands the concepts "first" and "last."

#### **WEBSITES**

- Kaiser Permanente: [kp.org/wa](http://kp.org/wa)
- American Academy of Pediatrics: [aap.org](http://aap.org)
- Bright Futures: [brightfutures.org](http://brightfutures.org)

#### **SUGGESTED READING**

- *Your Child's Health*, Schmitt
- *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5*, American Academy of Pediatrics
- *How to Get Your Child to Eat...But Not Too Much*, Satter
- *Guide to Your Child's Nutrition*, American Academy of Pediatrics

#### **Next well-child visit at 5 years old**

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