

Your School Aged Child

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INTRODUCTION

Your baby is growing up! As your child approaches middle childhood, there are bound to be new challenges to face. Emerging independence, continuing need for parental guidance, and increasing expectations from school and involvement in extracurricular activities are common challenges at this age. This is also an exciting time of growth, change and maturation, and parents continue to play a crucial role in these formative years.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

These are important years for establishing healthy lifestyle habits that will continue into the teenage years and adulthood. Get the whole family involved in making healthy choices such as:

- Choose healthy snacks including fruits, vegetables, nuts/cheeses.
- Ensure sufficient calcium intake: Children from ages 4 to 8 need 800 mg /day (threeservings) Children ages 9 and up need 1,300 mg/day (fourservings).
- Eliminate fast food, soda and juice from your diet.
- Exercise at least three to five times a week for 40 to 60 minutes.
- Limit screen time (television, video games, computer time) to no more than two hours per day and remove these items from your child's bedroom.
- Encourage your child to participate in sports or activities that keep him or her active. Make this part of his or her daily routine.
- If your provider has told you that your child is overweight, he or she may order lab tests to screen for liver problems, cholesterol and early signs of diabetes. If you have a family history of any of these illnesses, be sure to tell your child's health care provider.

ROUTINE HEALTH CARE

Your child should still come to see his or her health care provider every one to two years for a physical. At these visits, your provider will:

- Check your child's height, weight and body mass index
- Measure blood pressure
- Decide if vision and hearing tests are necessary
- Update immunizations as needed. Common vaccines needed at this age are:
 - Second dose of varicella (chicken pox), if not already received
 - At age 11 years, children generally receive a tetanus/whooping cough booster and the meningococcal vaccine. (Girls may also receive the HPV vaccine to prevent cervical cancer.)

CHANGING BODIES

As your child grows, you will begin to see the first signs of puberty. For girls, this is usually developing breasts. For boys, this is usually testicular enlargement. If you see signs of puberty before age 8 in girls or before age 9 in boys, it is a good idea to talk to your health care provider. Your child may begin to ask questions about puberty. Try to talk openly and honestly to them. You can find helpful information on our Web site for preteens at www.pamf.org/preteen.

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SLEEP

It is important to help your child get enough rest during these years. Chronic sleep deprivation can lead to behavioral issues and contribute to academic difficulties at school. Children at this age need 10 to 11 hours of sleep per day. It helps to have a regular bedtime each night. If your child sleeps much longer on weekends than on weekdays, it may be a sign that he or she is not getting enough rest during the week. If you feel your child has disrupted or restless sleep, snores on a regular basis, continues to wet the bed at night or has pauses in breathing when sleeping, discuss your concerns with your provider.



ACADEMICS

Expectations from school often increase during this time. Your child will be expected to take on more responsibility for school work and may have larger amounts of homework each night. Encourage your child to read every day and provide guidance and assistance as needed. Remember to make sure your expectations are appropriate for your child's age, and resist the urge to compare your child with other kids.

Sometimes children also face other challenges at school, such as school refusal, difficulty making friends, bullying, stress or even depression. Other children may begin to show signs of problems with attention or hyperactivity. If you are concerned about the school environment or your child's behavior and performance at school, schedule a meeting with his or her teacher, and discuss your concerns with your child's health care provider.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS

Friends begin to take on a bigger role in your child's life. Ask your child about who his or her friends are and what they talk about. Creating open lines of communication early will help your child feel comfortable talking to you about friends as he or she gets older. Make time to get to know other parents. Encourage play dates at home so you can observe how your child interacts with his or her peers.

The average age children begin experimenting with alcohol is 11 years old, so this is an appropriate time to start discussing drugs, alcohol and smoking with your kids. If you need help starting the conversation, you can get additional information at www.talkingwithkids.org.

