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Why Are Well-Child Visits Important?

Key Takeaways

- Are well-child visits necessary?
- What to expect during well-child visits
- Why are developmental screenings important
- Recommended schedule of check-ups for children

Regular check-ups, often referred to as well-child visits, begin shortly after birth and last until young adulthood. Because childhood is a time of rapid growth and change, regular well-child visits to the pediatrician are important to your child's health and well-being.

Well-child visits provide opportunities to raise questions and concerns about your child's development, behavior, and general well-being. Visits can include physical measurements, patient history, sensory screenings, behavioral assessments, and planned procedures (vaccinations, screenings and other tests).

Routine monitoring and screening can help identify developmental delays as early as possible. Early intervention can greatly improve a child's development. Such treatment can help children from birth through age 3 learn important verbal, social, and motor skills.

Why developmental monitoring is important

A delay in treatment for a developmental problem could result in an inability to do well in social and educational settings.

In the United States, about 13% of children ages 3 to 17 have a developmental or behavioral disability such as autism or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Many such children are not identified before age 10, by which time significant delays may already have occurred and opportunities for treatment may have been missed.

Although early intervention is extremely important, intervention at any age can be helpful. Regular well-child visits will help ensure that developmental delays are noted, and intervention is provided as needed.

Developmental monitoring and screening

Well-child visits allow doctors and nurses to have regular contact with your child to monitor your child's health and development. Your child's healthcare providers will track your child's growth and development while looking for developmental delays or problems.

Your child's doctor might ask you some questions or interact with your child during an examination to see how he or she plays, speaks, behaves, and moves. A delay in any of these areas could be a sign of a problem and could require further developmental screening. Developmental screening is a test to tell whether a child is learning basic skills when he or she should.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all children be screened for developmental delays and disabilities during regular well-child doctor visits at:

- 9 months
- 18 months
- 24 or 30 months

Additional screening may be needed if your child is at high risk for developmental problems, such as those resulting from preterm birth (birth before the 37th week of pregnancy) or low birth weight.

If your child has special health needs, she should have developmental monitoring and screening just like those children without special needs. Monitoring healthy development includes focusing not only on symptoms related to your child's condition, but also to her physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being.

Questions for doctors during well-child visits

Well-child visits will provide you with an opportunity to discuss any concerns with your child's pediatrician. Questions involving your child's sleeping or eating habits, safety, childhood diseases or what to expect as your child grows may be addressed. You should not hesitate or feel embarrassed to share information that further opens the doors of communication with your doctor.

Your child's immunizations

Immunizations are an important part of your child's health. During well-child visits, your pediatrician will usually administer vaccines based on the immunization schedule published by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

Recommended schedule of well-child visits

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends well-child visits at the following intervals:

- By 1 month
- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- 9 months
- 12 months
- 15 months
- 18 months
- 2 years
- 2 1/2 years
- 3 years
- Once every year thereafter until age 21

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