

Early Childhood (3-4 years)

Nutrition

Children learn about new foods by talking about them, shopping, and sharing mealtime with their family. Children should have three nutritious meals per day and one to two snacks per day. To be healthy, your child's diet should include five servings of fruits and vegetables daily. In addition, your child should have three servings of low fat dairy to ensure adequate calcium for healthy bone and teeth growth. Some children are picky eaters. Don't force feed your child. To avoid struggles, offer a variety of *healthy* foods and let your child choose what to eat. Minimize juices, soft drinks, chips, candy, and 'fast foods'. These are all "empty calories" which do little for your child's nutrition and promote excessive weight gain.

Oral Health

A child's first dentist visit should be scheduled by 12 months of age. There after visits should be every six months. Ideally children should brush their teeth after every meal. Children should also be taught to floss their teeth daily.

Sleep

Children require 8 to 12 hours of sleep per day. Between 2 and 5 years of age most children stop napping on a daily basis. A consistent bedtime routine (bath, books, bed, for example) helps children transition from evening to sleep more smoothly. If you are having difficulty with getting your child to sleep, we recommend a book called, "Healthy sleep habits, happy child", by Mark Weissbluth.

Development

There is a wide range of "normal" development and each child progresses at his/her own rate. In general, a three year old speaks in sentences, runs well, undresses himself, kicks a ball, peddles a tricycle, can copy a circle, knows colors, and shapes, does fantasy or pretend play and plays with other children. Most four year olds speak in sentences and their speech is intelligible to adults other than their parents. They run well, hop on one foot, peddle a bicycle with training wheels, copy a square or cross, draw a person with four body parts, and understand gender. Discuss any concerns regarding your child's development with your doctor. In addition, starting at three years of age, developmental assessments are performed at you local public school. Each public school has a pre-school, which is designed to address any delays in development and prepare children for kindergarten. Parents may contact their local public school directly.

Discipline

It is very important to praise your child's good behavior. Set limits, be consistent and establish consequences. Encourage your child to talk about feelings and activities. The following are some good resources

1,2,3 Magic – Effective Discipline for Children 2-12. By Thomas Phelan, PhD
Positive Discipline. By Jane Nelson
Touchpoints: Your Child's Emotional and Behavioral Development: Birth to Three: The Essential Reference for the Early Years. By T. Berry Brazelton

Safety

Children should remain in a 5 point harness car seat until they are 5 years of age OR weigh 40 pounds or more. In addition the AAP continues to recommend a booster seat until eight years of age AND weight 60 pounds or more. To avoid serious injury, children should **never** be placed in a front seat of a car with a passenger air bag. Children should always be supervised at bath time and near water. Always test the water temperature of the bath with your wrist prior to placing your child into the bath. To prevent burns turn the thermostat on your water heater down to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Keep hot liquids (coffee, soup) away from your child. Cook on the back burners and turn pot handles toward the back of the stove. Keep knives out of reach. Guns safety should be reinforced. Ask parents of playmates if there is a gun in the house. Guns should be kept unloaded, locked-up or removed from the house. Install in your home and check on a regular basis both smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. For your child's sake, keep your home and car free of tobacco smoke. All windows should have guards or safety locks installed to prevent children from falling out or through screens. All poisonous materials (including medicines, vitamins, cleaning substances, solvents, cosmetics, some plants) need to be placed out of your child's reach. Install locks on all cabinets, drawers, and closets that contain these materials. If your child swallows or inhales a substance, which may be poisonous, call the **Connecticut Poison Control Center** immediately at **(800) 222-1222**. Do not wait for symptoms to be present - call for help as soon as you can

Children should not be left alone at home until they are 13 years old. A babysitter should be at least 13 years old and be able to respond to emergencies. When outside, sunscreen and insect repellent should be used. Avoid lotions which combine sunscreen and insect repellent as insect repellent should be applied only once per day and sunscreen should be reapplied periodically especially after swimming. The most effective insect repellents contain DEET – 10-30% DEET is safe to use on children. Use a brimmed hat and an umbrella to provide shade from the sun. Children should be checked daily for ticks. The risk of Lyme disease is dramatically reduced if embedded ticks are removed within 24 hours.

For more information about child health, safety and parenting visit the American Academy of Pediatrics' web site @ WWW.AAP.ORG.