

To submit questions to *Healthy Children*, send an e-mail to healthychildren@aap.org or write to American Academy of Pediatrics
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Ask the Pediatrician

Solving the Riddles of Parenthood

1. Yellow Advisory

Q: Why is jaundice so common among newborns? Can it hurt my baby?

A: Jaundice, a yellowish color of the skin, occurs when babies have extra bilirubin in their system. Bilirubin is produced by the normal breakdown of blood cells and is usually removed by the liver. It takes a few days for a baby's liver to become efficient in removing bilirubin, which is why it is common for an infant to have mild jaundice. Mild jaundice is harmless, but if the bilirubin level gets too high it may need to be treated with special lights or increased feedings to prevent serious complications. This is why the AAP recommends that newborns be checked carefully by a pediatrician for jaundice or increased fluids.

2. Just Being Nosy

Q: Each winter my son gets nosebleeds during very cold weather. Can these be prevented?

A: Nosebleeds typically occur when the skin on the inside of the nose gets dry and cracked. This is common during winter months when the air is dry, especially with heaters running indoors. If a child is prone to picking his nose, this can increase the frequency, as well. Using a cold-air humidifier in your child's room at night, as well as saline nose drops or Vaseline applied inside the nostrils at night, may help. If bleeding is severe or recurrent, consult your pediatrician.



3. Home Away from Home

Q: I am getting ready to place my 4-year-old son in day care, and I am afraid he is not going to adjust well. What should I do?

A: It is perfectly normal for children to demonstrate behavior changes when beginning any new routine, especially one that involves extended time away from parents. Toddlers may cry, pout, refuse to go to child care, or act angry in other ways. Preschoolers may regress and behave like a younger child. Children who previously slept well may begin waking up again during the night. This behavior should go away

in a few days to weeks, as long as he is in a caring and stimulating child care center.

There are things that you can do to ease his transition and help him enjoy his new surroundings. First and foremost, try to keep other household routines as consistent as possible. Children work well with consistency at home. Be consistent when you drop your child off and pick him up from day care. If possible, visit the center or family child care home that you have chosen with your child before beginning care. Show your child that you like and trust the caregiver: Keep reminding him that you love him, that he will have fun, and that you will be there to pick him up at the end of the day.

4. No Room for Racism

Q: My fifth-grade daughter recently came home from school and was upset because she heard members of her class making racial slurs toward another student. Should I tell the school's administrators?

A: Yes. Schools should be a place where your child learns more than academic skills. They should also promote understanding and cooperation among people, not prejudice. Here are some questions to ask teachers and administrators about your child's educational environment:

- Is an emphasis placed on cooperation and team play rather than individual competition?
- Does the school have a curriculum that covers the different races, religions, and cultures of present-day America?
- Do teachers have open discussions in class about discrimination and negative feelings toward others?
- If an incident involving prejudice has occurred at school or in the community, is it used as a springboard to discuss these issues in a sensitive, nonpunitive way?

5. New Hope for Defeating Rotavirus

Q: I recently read something about a new vaccine for rotavirus. What is it, and do you recommend my children be vaccinated against it?

A: Rotavirus is the most common cause of severe diarrhea among children and is responsible for the deaths of more than 600,000 children worldwide each year. Almost every child will get rotavirus at least once in the first few years of life. Infants are especially at risk for serious complications from the virus since they can become dehydrated very quickly. The AAP now recommends routine immunization of infants with three doses of rotavirus vaccine. It is administered by mouth at 2, 4, and 6 months of age. The first dose, however, can be given anytime between six to 12 weeks of age, but should not be initiated for infants older than 12 weeks of age. Subsequent doses should be administered at four- to 10-week intervals and all three doses of vaccine should be completed by 32 weeks of age.

6. Getting to Know You

Q: I am getting ready for my first visit to the pediatrician. What should I do to prepare for the visit?

A: When you visit your pediatrician's office:

- For toddlers and older children, role-play at home and prepare them for the doctor's visit.
- If your child has special needs, bring a list of any questions or concerns about those needs to discuss.
- Share information on how your child is developing (progressing, regressing, etc.).
- Ask about resources that may help your child and family such as parenting workshops, books, or Web sites.
- Ask who you should call and who will see your child when care is needed after hours or on weekends.
- Try to meet the office staff that will be working with you and your child (nurses, referral coordinator, billing person, etc.)

7. Wisdom About Teeth

Q: What is early childhood caries?

A: Early childhood caries (ECC, formerly known as baby bottle tooth decay) is caused by contact between your child's teeth and any liquids or foods other than water for long periods of time. The liquid or food collects around the teeth, where bacteria change the natural or added sugars into acid. This acid can dissolve the outer layer of the teeth, causing them to decay. The most common way this happens is when parents put their children to bed with a bottle of anything other than water. But it can also happen when children are allowed to drink from a sippy cup, suck on a bottle, or breastfeed for long periods of time during the day or night. If left untreated, ECC can destroy the baby teeth and cause infection and decay in permanent teeth.

Here are some important guidelines for preventing ECC:

- Never put your child to bed with a bottle or food. Not only does this expose your child's teeth to sugars, it can also put your child at risk for ear infections and choking.
- Only give your child a bottle during meals. Do not use a bottle or sippy cup as a pacifier or let your child walk around with or drink from them for long periods of time.
- Teach your child to drink from a cup as soon

as possible. Drinking from a cup is less likely to cause the liquid to collect around the teeth. Also, a cup cannot be taken to bed.

- If your child must have a bottle or sippy cup for long periods, fill it only with water. During car rides offer only water if your child is thirsty.



- Keep your baby's mouth clean by gently brushing the gums and teeth with water and a soft infant toothbrush or gauze.
- Once your baby has eight teeth, you can start using a child-sized toothbrush for daily cleanings.
- Brush your child's teeth twice a day. The best times to brush are after breakfast and before bed. Start by using a fluoride-free toothpaste. When your child is able to spit and not swallow the toothpaste (usually around ages 2 to 3), you should continue brushing his or her teeth using a pea-sized amount of toothpaste containing fluoride.

8. The Old College Try

Q: Our son is beginning to look at colleges, and we are clueless about how the process works these days. Do you have any suggestions?

A: In a new book, *Less Stress, More Success: A New Approach to Guiding Your Teen Through College Admissions and Beyond*, a dean of college admissions and a leading pediatrician address exactly this topic. By considering both the academic and maturity issues related to their college-bound kids, parents can learn how to best support and encourage healthy achievement. Teens can learn how to manage the application process and evaluate campus culture for the right fit.