

Successful Parenting *Being the Best Parent You Can Be*

Caring for Your Child

Caring for your child is the most important work you will do as a parent. You can take good care of your child by following a few simple rules. Be sure your child:

- Eats nutritious foods
- Is clean and has good medical care
- Is safe
- Gets the sleep he or she needs
- Gets plenty of the right kind of attention

Feeding Your Baby

Before birth, your baby will need a healthy diet. Eat foods with a lot of vitamins, and ask your doctor to recommend a good diet during pregnancy.

After birth, your baby will depend on breast milk or formula for the first few months. He or she will be growing quickly, so feed the baby whenever he or she is hungry. Your doctor will tell you when to introduce solid foods, usually when your baby is four to six months old. Sometime around the first birthday, babies will want to begin feeding themselves, even though they may lack the coordination. Be prepared for messy mealtimes!

Do your best to make mealtime a fun, learning experience. Your baby will feel a wonderful sense of accomplishment from learning this new skill. Regular meals help you to be sure your baby is getting the nutrition he or she needs when it is needed.

Remember: babies probably don't need to eat a lot at one time. Don't force a baby to eat, or mealtime will be an occasion for tears and unhappiness. Most important, try to make meals pleasant and relaxing.

Keeping Your Child Clean and Healthy

Part of caring for your child is being sure he or she is clean and receives necessary medical care. This care begins before your baby is born. If you have regular prenatal doctor visits and avoid cigarettes, alcohol and other drugs, you will increase your child's chances for good health.

Once babies are born, they need to see the doctor for regular well-child visits. During these visits the doctor monitors their development, measures growth and weight gain, and will immunize them against various diseases. In spite of these well-child visits, they will probably have minor illnesses during childhood. Call your doctor whenever you have a concern about the health of your child.

When children are about two years old, regular dental visits should begin. Keeping your child clean will help keep him or her healthy. Set up a daily routine for bathing, teethbrushing, and hair-combing. Teach your child to wash his or her hands before meals.

Your Child's Safety

When your baby is small, never let him or her out of your sight unless they are in a crib or another equally safe place. If the phone rings, for instance, leave it unanswered rather than leave your baby unattended.

Toddlers are curious and love to explore, but they don't know when they're getting into dangerous situations. It's up to you to keep your little one safe. As soon as your baby starts to crawl, child-proof your home. Go through your house on your hands and knees to see it from your toddler's perspective. Look for items that will appeal to your child. If you find something dangerous, remove it!

Your toddler will usually listen when you say "no" but may soon forget what you said. Toddlers don't necessarily intend to be disobedient, they just aren't able to remember instructions yet.

Helping Your Child Develop Good Sleep Habits

Healthy, happy children need regular sleep. Most infants sleep a lot. Your baby may sleep whenever he or she is not eating. On the other hand, if your baby is colicky, he or she may be awake and cry a lot. Holding colicky babies helps relax them.

As your baby grows older he or she will sleep less and less and soon their routine will include regular time awake, combined with naps. Between the ages of three and five your child will probably no longer need naps.

Children feel best if they have a regular bedtime. Having a bedtime routine helps a child settle down and get ready to sleep. This routine may consist of a bath, brushing teeth, a story, and tucking into bed. Most children under the age of 12 need 10-12 hours of sleep to feel their best.

Paying Attention to Your Child

Your attention is important to your child. Talk to your baby and play with him or her. As your child grows older, he or she may act as if they know more than you do and may seem to ignore your opinions.

Remember: you are the biggest influence on your children's lives. Even if they behave as if your opinions don't matter, they really do hear you. Be sure to give them positive attention. Remember to praise their efforts and recognize the skills they are developing.

When you take good care of your child, you show them that you love and respect them. Your love and respect are the basis for the self-esteem your child needs to become a happy, healthy adult.