

Keeping Your Child Healthy

Hilliard Pediatrics, Inc. – Dr. Tim Teller, M.D. – 6-13

Introduction.

We all want our children to stay healthy. Many of the everyday things that we do effect how healthy we stay in life. This handout will help you think about these issues and, hopefully, help keep your child healthier.

Avoiding Germs.

This is the big issue and the hardest one to change! As much as it is *no* fun to think about, everyday contact with other children and adults exposes us to many germs on a regular basis. And it is not just contact with other people; it is contact with toys, door knobs, play areas, and other things that have touched someone else in the last few hours that exposes us to germs. It is important to remember that we cannot “get rid of all of our germs”. On our skin, in our mouth and throat, and in our stomach and intestines, we have some germs (bacteria and yeast) that help keep us healthy. For instance, the “healthy” germs on our skin and in our stomach and intestines help keep “bad germs” from making us sick. We would have more skin infections and severe diarrhea if these healthy germs were not there to protect us.

So what to do? Wash your hands regularly, especially before you eat and after you use the restroom. Wash with soap and water for 15-20 seconds. If you cannot use soap and water, hand sanitizers are a good option.

Do not exposure yourself or your child to tobacco.

Cigarette, pipe, and cigar smoke is dangerous. It makes all of these more likely: skin cancer, mouth cancer, lung cancer, ear infections, sinus infections, bronchitis, chronic cough, high blood pressure, strokes, and heart attacks. Chewing tobacco causes similar problems as well as problems with the teeth and the stomach. If you smoke, quit. If your teenager smokes or chews tobacco, help them quit. Remember that the smell of smoke on clothes and hair or smoking in the same room can cause similar problems as if that person was the one smoking. At the least, the smoker should smoke as far away from others as possible and smoking outside would be best.

Eat Healthy.

Eating a well-balanced diet really does keep one healthier. Getting plenty of milk and dairy (2 servings per day before puberty and 3 per day during and after puberty), eating fresh fruit and vegetables (a total of at least 5 servings per day), getting enough protein foods, and eating healthy grains all are part of a healthy diet. Minimize your child’s intake of caffeine, which can cause stomach upset, headaches, nervousness, and difficulty sleeping. Having any child past their first birthday regularly drink 1 to 2 cups of water per day is recommended. Although small amounts of juice and sweets are fine, larger amounts are not healthy for us.

Have your child stay up to date with their immunizations.

We can provide good protection against many illnesses with our vaccines. Staying up to date with the vaccines keeps a child (and adult!) healthier. It is now recommended that everyone should get the flu vaccine every year, usually in the late Summer or Fall.

Be Safe.

Your child will stay healthier if we can keep them safe. Everyone should wear a helmet when biking, skating, and skiing. Properly restrain everyone in the car. Keep children safe around flames and heat. Do not play with fireworks. Wear the right gear for sports, including helmets, pads, eye protection, and other protective equipment. Do not allow your children to play without supervision near flames, fireplaces, or fires. Keep medications and chemicals out of reach of children. Teach your children to be cautious around animals (including dogs and cats) that they do not know. Make sure children are well-supervised around water and make sure they learn how to swim. Have children play with toys that are appropriate for their age and avoid smaller children playing with toys that could be a choking hazard.

Medications.

Use the right dose with over the counter medicines. Large overdoses of even everyday over the counter medications can be deadly. Check with us, our website, or the pharmacy if you have questions about medications, their uses, and their doses. Do not allow medications prescribed for one person to be used by someone else unless told to do so by a doctor or nurse.

Exercise Regularly.

Although we do not need to encourage the average toddler to run and play, as children (and adults!) get older it is important to regularly get exercise. It does not matter what someone does for exercise as long as it regularly happens. You have probably heard the rule about getting 20-30 minutes of exercise 3 times a week. If someone is not keeping a healthy weight, exercising more often is important.

Protect Yourself From the Sun.

The sun ages our skin, increases wrinkles, and increases our risk for skin cancer. Avoid prolonged exposure during the middle of the day (10am to 2pm) when the sun most likely to cause this trouble. When out in the sun, use sunscreen with at least an SPF (“sun protection factor”) of 30, reapplying it regularly according to the sunscreen’s instructions. Wear a hat and clothing to protect your skin from the sun and sunglasses to protect your eyes from the sun.

Keeping Everyone Healthy in Daycares, Preschools, and Schools.

Avoiding illnesses and keeping everyone healthier in classroom settings is difficult. Remember to keep children home when they are actively sick. This lets them to feel better faster and keeps other children and adults from being exposed to the germ. As a working parent, I realize you have the pressure of getting the kids back to school when they are improving so that you can get back to work. Children with Strep throat or pinkeye (bacterial conjunctivitis) need to be on an antibiotic for 24 hours before they can return to the classroom. Children with vomiting, diarrhea, or both should stay home until the vomiting has stopped and the diarrhea is gone (at least until the bowel movement is more formed and not more than 1-2 times a day). The rules about staying home when a rash happens depend on the illness. A child with a fever should not go to school that day.

Protect Your Hearing.

Exposure to loud noise can cause hearing loss. Long term exposure can cause permanent problems with hearing. Protect your child’s hearing with hearing protection (ear plugs or headphones) at events (concerts, fireworks, car races, and others) where you may be exposed to loud noises. Watch the volume of your children’s headphones or earphones with music players. A sign that the noise is too loud is when the noise from the earphones or headphones can be easily heard when you stand near someone listening to the music.

Keep Your Teeth Healthy.

By three years of age, everyone should regularly see a dentist. Brush your child’s teeth at least twice a day. Plain water is fine to use with brushing before the child can spit out toothpaste (often by 2-3 years of age). Once the child can spit, use fluoride toothpaste to reduce cavities.

Limit Screen Time.

Between TV, computers, and hand-held electronics, we are all around lots of “screen time”. You will need to work out rules within your family for how much time each day and week can be spent on screen-watching. Officially, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no TV exposure for children less than 2 years of age and only 1-2 hours per day of screen time for older children. These recommendations may not be practical for everyone, but what is important is to monitor what your children are seeing, controlling your child’s exposure to things that are not age appropriate (violence, bad language, etc.), and to use what they see as a way to discuss things (about commercials and good or bad examples of behavior on TV). Screen time can become such a habit that it is good to remind children that there are some many other important things to do: read, play with friends and family, play games, ride bikes, play a sport, etc. Set a good example as the parent with limiting your screen time and choosing what you watch carefully.