

# Fun in the Sun: Keep Your Baby Safe



Warm, sunny days are wonderful. The sun feels good on your skin. But what feels good can be very bad for you, your family, and especially your baby. Before you take your baby to the park, beach, or even out into the backyard, please read this. It will help you learn how to protect your entire family and develop safe sun habits that can last a lifetime.

## Skin cancer and the sun

The sun provides energy to all living things on earth. But it can also harm us. Its ultraviolet (UV) rays can cause sunburn and skin cancer.

The sun is the main cause of skin cancer, the most common form of cancer in the United States. There will be a million new cases of skin cancer this year. Skin cancer can and does occur in children and young adults, but most of the people who get skin cancer are older. Older people get skin cancer because they have already received too much of the sun's damaging rays. Your skin remembers each sunburn and each suntan year after year.

All skin cancers are harmful and some, especially malignant melanoma, can be deadly if left untreated. Malignant melanoma is the second most common form of cancer in women 25 to 34 years of age. Sun exposure in early childhood and adolescence contributes to skin cancer.

## The sun and your baby's skin

Your baby's skin is very delicate and it's up to you to protect it. Sunburns hurt. Sunburns can also cause dehydration and fever. Too many sunburns and too much sun exposure over the years can cause not only skin cancer, but also wrinkles and cataracts of the eye.

Most of our sun exposure—between 60% and 80%—happens before we turn 18 years of age. That's because children spend more time outdoors than most adults, especially in the summer.

## The dangers of sunburns

Research has shown that two or more blistering sunburns as a child or teen increase the risk of developing skin cancer later in life. It is very important, therefore, to protect babies and children from sunburn.

- A baby's sensitive skin is thinner than adult skin and a baby will sunburn more easily than an adult. Even babies with naturally darker skin need protection.
- It's up to you to protect your baby. A baby can't tell you when he is too hot or beginning to sunburn. Your baby can't move out of the sun and into the shade without your help.

## Protecting your baby

Follow these simple rules to protect your baby from sunburns now and from skin cancer later in life:

- Babies under 6 months of age should be kept out of direct sunlight. Move your baby to the shade or under a tree, umbrella, or the stroller canopy.
- Dress your baby in clothing that covers the body, such as comfortable lightweight long pants, long-sleeved shirts, and hats with brims that shade the face and cover the ears.
- Select clothes made of tightly woven fabrics. Clothes that have a tighter weave—the way a fabric is constructed—generally protect better than clothes with a broader weave. If you're not sure about how tight a fabric's weave is, hold the clothing up to a lamp or window and see how much light shines through. The less light, the better. Clothing made of cotton is both cool and protective.
- When using a cap with a bill, make sure the bill is facing forward to shield the baby's face. Child-sized sunglasses with UV protection are also a good idea for protecting your child's eyes.

## Remember...

- The sun's rays are the strongest between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm. Try to keep your baby out of the sun during these hours.
- The sun's damaging UV rays can bounce back from sand, snow, or concrete; so be particularly careful in these areas.
- Most of the sun's rays can come through the clouds on an overcast day; so use sun protection *even on cloudy days*.

## Sunscreen for your baby

Choose a sunscreen made for children. For babies *under* 6 months of age, sunscreen may be used on small areas of the body such as the face and the backs of the hands if adequate clothing and shade are not available. For babies over 6 months of age, test the sunscreen on your baby's back for a reaction before applying it all over. Apply carefully around the eyes, avoiding the eyelids. If your baby rubs sunscreen into her eyes, wipe the eyes and hands clean with a damp cloth. If the sunscreen irritates her eyes, try a different brand or try a sunscreen stick or sunblock with titanium dioxide or zinc oxide. If a rash develops, talk to your pediatrician.

When choosing a sunscreen, look for the words "broad-spectrum" on the label—it means that the sunscreen will screen out both ultraviolet B (UVB) and ultraviolet A (UVA) rays. A sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 should be adequate in most cases.

Use enough sunscreen and rub it in well, making sure to cover all exposed areas, especially your baby's face, nose, ears, feet, and hands and even the backs of the knees. Put it on 30 minutes before going outdoors. The sunscreen needs time to work on the skin. Reapply the sunscreen frequently, especially if your baby is playing in the water. Zinc oxide, a very effective sunblock, can be used as extra protection on the nose, cheeks, tops of the ears, and the shoulders.

### Remember...

- Sunscreens should be used for sun protection and not as a reason to stay in the sun longer.

### Sunburn can be dangerous

If your baby gets a sunburn and is under 1 year of age, contact your pediatrician at once—a severe sunburn is an emergency. For babies over the age of 1 year, tell your pediatrician if there is blistering, pain, or fever.

### Remember...

- Avoid sunburns—they can be very dangerous to a baby.
- If your baby gets a sunburn, give juice or water to your baby to replace lost fluids.
- Cool water soaks may help your baby's skin feel better.
- *Do not use* any medicated lotions on your baby's skin unless your pediatrician recommends it.
- Keep your baby completely out of the sun until the sunburn is totally healed.

### Set a good example

Make sun protection a regular family event. Your baby needs you for protection from the sun and from sunburns. Since babies learn by imitation, you can be the best teacher by practicing sun protection yourself. Teach all members of your family how to protect their skin.

### Sun myths

- Myth:** A suntan is good for your baby.  
**Fact:** A tan is a sign of skin damage.
- Myth:** Babies can't get sunburned on a cloudy day.  
**Fact:** Most of the sun's rays can come through clouds and cause sunburns.
- Myth:** Baby oil is good sun lotion.  
**Fact:** Baby oil causes the skin to burn faster and offers no protection at all.
- Myth:** Your baby needs the vitamins that the sun provides.  
**Fact:** A proper well-balanced diet and minimum sunlight will give your baby all the necessary vitamins.

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### From your doctor

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# Starting Solid Foods

Adapted from *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5*



Until now, your baby's diet has been made up of breast milk and/or formula. But once your child reaches 4 to 6 months of age, you can begin adding solid foods. This brochure has been developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics to give parents information on how to introduce solid foods to their infants. The information in this brochure is based on the Academy's parenting manual *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5*.

## When can my baby eat solid foods?

Most babies are ready to eat solid foods at 4 to 6 months of age. Before this age, most babies do not have enough control over their tongues and mouth muscles. Instead of swallowing the food, they push their tongues against the spoon or the food. This tongue-pushing reflex helps babies when they are nursing or drinking from a bottle. Most babies lose this reflex at about 4 months of age. Energy needs of babies increase around this age as well, making this an ideal time to introduce solids.

You may start solid foods at any feeding. At first you may want to pick a time when you do not have many distractions. However, keep in mind that as your child gets older, she will want to eat with the rest of the family.

## Feeding your baby solid foods

To prevent choking, make sure your baby is sitting up when you introduce solid foods. If your baby cries or turns away when you give him the food, do not force the issue. It is more important that you both enjoy mealtimes than for your baby to start solids by a specific date. Go back to nursing or bottle-feeding exclusively for a week or two, then try again.

It is important for your baby to get used to the process of eating — sitting up, taking bites from a spoon, resting between bites, and stopping when full. Always use a spoon to feed your baby solid foods. Some parents try putting solid foods in a bottle or infant feeder with a nipple. This is not a good idea. Feeding your baby this way can cause choking. It also greatly increases the amount of food your baby eats and can cause your baby to gain too much weight. These early experiences will help your child learn good eating habits throughout life.

## How to start

Start with half a spoonful or less and talk to your baby through the process ("Mmm, see how good this is!"). Your baby may not know what to do at first. She may look confused or insulted, wrinkle her nose, roll the food around her mouth, or reject it altogether. This is a normal reaction, because her feedings have been so different up to this point.

One way to make eating solids for the first time easier is to give your baby a little milk first, then switch to very small half-spoonfuls of food, and finish with more milk. This will prevent your baby from getting frustrated when she is very hungry.

Do not be surprised if most of the first few solid-food feedings wind up on your baby's face, hands, and bib. Increase the amount of food gradually, with just a teaspoonful or two to start. This allows your baby time to learn how to swallow solids.

## What kinds of foods should my baby eat?

For most babies it does not matter what the first solid foods are. Many pediatricians recommend cereals first. The first cereals usually are offered in this order:

- Rice cereal
- Oatmeal cereal
- Barley cereal

It is a good idea to give your baby wheat and mixed cereals last, because they may cause allergic reactions in very young babies.

You can use premixed baby cereals in a jar or dry cereals to which you add breast milk, formula, or water. The premixed foods may be easier to use, but the dry ones are richer in iron and allow you to control the thickness of the cereal. Whichever type of cereal you choose, make sure that it is made for babies. Only baby foods contain the extra nutrients your child needs at this age.

Once your baby learns to eat one food, gradually give him other foods such as

- Infant cereals
- Fruit
- Strained vegetables

Give your baby eggs last, because they occasionally cause allergic reactions. Babies are born with a preference for sweets. The order of introducing foods does not change this.

Give your baby one new food at a time, and wait at least 2 to 3 days before starting another. After each new food, watch for any allergic reactions such as diarrhea, rash, or vomiting. If any of these occur, stop using the new food and talk with your pediatrician.

Within 2 or 3 months of starting solid foods, your baby's daily diet should include the following foods each day:

- Breast milk or formula
- Cereal
- Vegetables
- Meats
- Fruits

## Finger foods

Once your baby can sit up and bring her hands or other objects to her mouth, you can give her finger foods to help her learn to feed herself. To avoid choking, make sure anything you give your child is soft, easy to swallow, and cut into small pieces. Some examples include small pieces of banana, wafer-type cookies, or crackers; and well-cooked and cut-up yellow squash, peas, and potatoes. Do not give your baby any food that requires chewing at this age.

At each of your child's daily meals, she should be eating about 4 ounces, or the amount in one small jar of strained baby food. (Do not give your child foods that are made for adults. These foods often have added salt and preservatives.)

If you want to give your baby fresh food, use a blender or food processor, or just mash softer foods with a fork. All fresh foods should be cooked with no added salt or seasoning. Though you can feed your baby raw bananas (mashed), most other fruits and vegetables should be cooked until they are soft. Refrigerate any

### **Warning: do not home-prepare beets, turnips, carrots, spinach, or collard greens**

In some parts of the country, these vegetables have large amounts of nitrates, chemicals that can cause an unusual type of anemia (low blood count) in young infants. Baby food companies are aware of this problem and screen the produce they buy for nitrates. They also avoid buying these vegetables in parts of the country where nitrates have been found. Because you cannot test for this chemical yourself, it is safer to use commercially prepared forms of these foods, especially while your child is an infant. If you choose to prepare them at home anyway, serve them fresh and do not store them. Storage of these foods may actually increase the amount of nitrates in them.

food you do not use and look for any signs of spoilage before giving it to your baby. Fresh foods are not bacteria-free, so they will spoil more quickly than food from a can or jar.

### **What can I expect after my baby starts solids?**

When your child starts eating solid foods, his stools will become more solid and variable in color. Due to the added sugars and fats, they will have a much stronger odor too. Peas and other green vegetables may turn the stool a deep-green color; beets may make it red. (Beets sometimes make urine red as well.) If your baby's meals are not strained, his stools may contain undigested pieces of food, especially hulls of peas or corn, and the skin of tomatoes or other vegetables. All of this is normal. Your child's digestive system is still immature and needs time before it can fully process these new foods. If the stools are extremely loose, watery, or full of mucus, however, it may mean the digestive tract is irritated. In this case, reduce the amount of solids and let him build a tolerance for them a little more slowly. If the stools continue to be loose, watery, or full of mucus, consult your pediatrician to see if your child has a digestive problem.

### **Should I give my baby juice?**

Babies do not need juice. Babies less than 6 months of age should not be given juice. However, if you choose to give your baby juice, do so only after she is 6 months of age and offer it only in a cup, not in a bottle. Limit juice intake to no more than 4 ounces a day and offer it only with a meal or snack. Any more than this can fill up your baby, giving her less of an appetite for other, more nutritious foods, including breast milk or formula. Too much juice also can cause diaper rash, diarrhea, or excessive weight gain. To help prevent tooth decay, avoid putting your child to bed with a bottle.

Give your child extra water if she seems to be thirsty between feedings. During the hot months when your child is losing fluid through sweat, offer water two or more times a day. If you live in an area where the water is fluoridated, these feedings also will help prevent future tooth decay.

### **Junior foods**

When your child reaches about 8 months of age, you may want to introduce "junior" foods. These are slightly coarser than strained foods and are packaged in larger jars — usually 6 to 8 ounces. They require more chewing than baby foods. You also can expand your baby's diet to include soft foods such as puddings, mashed potatoes, yogurt, and gelatin. As always, introduce one food at a time, then wait 2 or 3 days before trying something else to be sure your child does not develop an allergic reaction.

As your baby's ability to use his hands improves, give him his own spoon and let him play with it at mealtimes. Once he has figured out how to hold the spoon, dip it in his food and let him try to feed himself. But do not expect much in the

beginning, when more food is bound to go on the floor and high chair than into his mouth. A plastic cloth under his chair will help minimize some of the cleanup.

Be patient, and resist the temptation to take the spoon away from him. For a while you may want to alternate bites from his spoon with bites from a spoon that you hold. Your child may not be able to use a spoon on his own until after his first birthday. Until then, you may want to fill the spoon for your child but leave the actual feeding to him. This can help decrease the mess and waste.

Good finger foods for babies include the following:

- Crunchy toast
- Well-cooked pasta
- Small pieces of chicken
- Scrambled egg
- Ready-to-eat cereals
- Small pieces of banana

Offer a variety of flavors, shapes, colors, and textures, but always watch your child for choking in case he bites off a piece that is too big to swallow.

Because children often swallow without chewing, do not offer children younger than 4 years of age the following foods:

- Chunks of peanut butter
- Nuts and seeds
- Popcorn
- Raw vegetables
- Hard, gooey, or sticky candy
- Raisins
- Chewing Gum

Other firm, round foods like grapes, cooked carrots, hot dogs, meat sticks (baby food "hot dogs"), or chunks of cheese or meat always should be cut into **very small** pieces. Before cutting a hot dog, remove the slippery peel.

### **Choosing a high chair**

Select a chair with a wide base, so it cannot be tipped over if someone bumps against it.

If the chair folds, be sure it is locked each time you set it up.

Whenever your child sits in the chair, use the safety straps. This will prevent your child from slipping down and causing serious injury or even death. Never allow your child to stand in the high chair.

Do not place the high chair near a counter or table. Your child may be able to push hard enough against these surfaces to tip the chair over.

Never leave a young child alone in a high chair and do not allow older children to climb or play on it, as this could tip it over.

A high chair that hooks on to a table is not a good substitute for a more solid one. If you plan to use this type of chair when you eat out or when you travel, look for one that locks on to the table. Be sure the table is heavy enough to support your child's weight without tipping. Also, check to see whether your child's feet can touch a table support. If your child pushes against the table, it may dislodge the seat.

### **Good eating habits start early**

Babies and small children do not know what foods they need to eat. Your job as a parent is to offer a good variety of healthy foods. Watch your child for cues that she has had enough to eat. Do not overfeed!

Begin to build good eating habits. Usually eating five to six times a day (three meals and two to three snacks) is a good way to meet toddlers' energy needs. Children who "graze," or eat constantly, may never really feel hungry. They can have problems from eating too much or too little.

If you are concerned that your baby is *already* overweight, talk with your pediatrician before making any changes to her diet. During these months of rapid growth, your baby needs a balanced diet that includes fat, carbohydrates, and protein. It is not wise to switch a baby under 2 years of age to skim milk, for example, or to other low-fat substitutes for breast milk or formula. A better solution might be to slightly reduce the amount of food your child eats at each meal. This way, your child will continue to get the balanced diet she needs.

Your pediatrician will help you determine if your child is overfed, not eating enough, or eating too many of the wrong kinds of foods. Because prepared baby foods have no added salt, you do not have to worry about salt at this age. However, be aware of the eating habits of others in your family. As your baby eats more and more "table foods," she will imitate the way you eat, including using salt and nibbling on snacks. For your child's sake as well as your own, cut your salt use and watch how much fat you consume. Provide a good role model by eating a variety of healthy foods.

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**From your doctor**

**American Academy  
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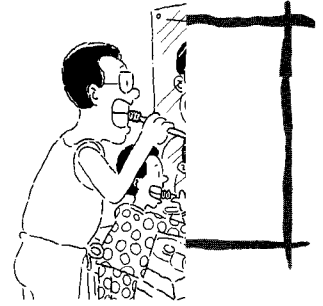
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Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0747  
Web site — <http://www.aap.org>

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# A Guide to Children's Dental Health



The road to a bright smile begins long before the first tooth breaks through the gum. Parents play a big part in helping their children develop healthy teeth. Early monitoring by a pediatrician or dentist is important.

Steps to good dental health include

- Regular care by a dental professional
- Getting enough fluoride
- Regular brushing and flossing
- Eating right

It's important for parents to care for their teeth too because cavity-causing bacteria can be easily transferred when sharing food or drinks. By following these steps and teaching them to your children, your entire family can benefit from good dental health.

Read more to learn why fluoride is important, when to start cleaning your child's teeth, if pacifier use or thumb sucking hurt teeth, about foods that can lead to tooth decay, about pediatric dentists, and good dental habits.

## Why is fluoride important?

*Fluoride* is a natural chemical that can be added to drinking water and toothpaste. It strengthens *tooth enamel* (the hard outer coating on teeth). Fluoride also helps repair early damage to teeth.

The fluoride content of local water supplies varies. Check with your local water department to find out the exact water fluoride level in your area. Then talk with your child's pediatrician or dentist to see if she needs additional fluoride, such as fluoride drops or tablets. The need for fluoride is based on your child's *caries* (tooth decay) risk.

## When should I start cleaning my child's teeth?

Daily dental cleaning should start as soon as your infant's first tooth appears. Wipe the teeth with a piece of gauze or a damp cloth. Switch to a toothbrush with a fluoride toothpaste as your child gets older. Because children tend to swallow toothpaste, put only a small (pea-sized) amount of fluoride toothpaste on your child's toothbrush and press the toothpaste into the bristles. Taking in too much fluoride while brushing can result in *fluorosis* (spotting of the teeth).

Also, check the teeth for early signs of tooth decay. Cavities appear as white, yellow, or brown spots or lines on the teeth. Any 2 teeth that are touching each other should be flossed to prevent a cavity from forming between the teeth. An ideal baby bite should have spaces between the front teeth. If your child's teeth are touching early, this is a sign that dental crowding may occur in the adult teeth that may require future orthodontic care.

## Does pacifier use or thumb sucking hurt teeth?

If a child sucks strongly on a pacifier, his thumb, or his fingers, this habit may affect the shape of his mouth or how his teeth are lining up. If a child stops using a pacifier by 3 years of age, his bite will most likely correct itself. If a child stops sucking on a pacifier, his thumb, or his fingers before his permanent front teeth come in, there's a chance his bite will correct itself. If your child continues his sucking habit after his adult teeth have come in, then orthodontic care may be needed to realign his teeth.

## Food that can lead to tooth decay

Sweets like candy or cookies can lead to tooth decay. Sugar from fruits and fruit juices left on the teeth for a long time is not healthy for teeth. Frequent sipping on drinks such as fruit juices and sodas can also cause tooth decay. Starchy foods, such as crackers, and sticky foods and candies, such as raisins, fruit roll-ups, and gummy bears, tend to stay on the teeth longer. These foods also are more likely to lead to tooth decay.

Starches and fruits, however, are a necessary part of any child's diet. To avoid tooth decay, give your child these foods only at mealtime (before the teeth have been brushed). For healthy teeth, offer your child a well-balanced diet with a variety of foods. Drinking water with fluoride is an excellent way to keep teeth healthy.

## Pediatric dentists

During regular well-child visits, your child's pediatrician will check her teeth and gums to make sure they are healthy. If your child has dental problems, your child's pediatrician may refer her to a dental professional.

A pediatric dentist specializes in the care of children's teeth, but some general dentists also treat children. Pediatricians may refer children younger than 1 year to a dental professional if the child

- Chips or injures a tooth or has an injury to the face or mouth.
- Has teeth that show any signs of discoloration. This could be a sign of tooth decay.
- Complains of tooth pain or is sensitive to hot or cold foods or liquids. This could also be a sign of decay.
- Has any abnormal lesion (growth) inside the mouth.
- Has an unusual bite—the teeth do not fit together right.

### Good dental habits

Regular dental checkups, a balanced diet, fluoride, injury prevention, habit control, and brushing and flossing are all important for healthy teeth. Starting children off with good dental habits now will help them grow up with healthy smiles.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that all infants receive oral health risk assessments by 6 months of age. Infants at higher risk of early dental caries should be referred to a dentist as early as 6 months of age and no later than 6 months after the first tooth erupts or 12 months of age (whichever comes first).

All children should have a comprehensive dental exam by a dentist in the early toddler years.

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# Baby Bottle Tooth Decay—

## How to Prevent It

Proper dental care is a lifelong commitment that starts even before your baby's first tooth forms. While daily cleanings and fluoride are important, they alone may not prevent Baby Bottle Tooth Decay (BBTD), a major cause of tooth decay in infants. Baby Bottle Tooth Decay is costly to treat. If left untreated, however, it can quickly destroy the teeth involved. It also can lead to pain, infection, early loss of baby teeth, crooked permanent teeth, and an increased risk of decay in permanent teeth. When you consider the possible dental problems that can result from BBTD and the cost of treating those problems, it is best to prevent BBTD from developing in the first place.

### How Does Baby Bottle Tooth Decay Develop?

Baby Bottle Tooth Decay can develop if your child's teeth and gums are in prolonged contact with almost any liquid other than water. This can happen from putting your child to bed with a bottle of formula, milk, juice, soft drinks, sugar water, sugared drinks, etc. Allowing your baby to suck on a bottle or breastfeed for longer than a mealtime, either when awake or asleep, also can cause BBTD.

When liquid from a baby bottle builds up in the mouth, the natural or added sugars found in the liquid are changed to acid by germs in the mouth. This acid then starts to dissolve the teeth (mainly the upper front teeth), causing them to decay. Baby Bottle Tooth Decay can lead to severe damage to your child's baby teeth and also can cause dental problems that affect your child's permanent teeth.

### Why Are Baby Teeth Important?

Many parents assume that decay does not matter in baby teeth because the teeth will fall out anyway, but decay in baby teeth poses risks. If your child loses his baby teeth too early because of decay or infection, the permanent teeth will not be ready to replace them yet. Baby teeth act as a guide for the permanent teeth. If baby teeth are lost too early, the teeth that are left may shift position to fill in the gaps. This may not leave any room for the permanent teeth to come in.

### What Can I Do to Prevent Baby Bottle Tooth Decay?

Take the following steps to prevent Baby Bottle Tooth Decay:

- Never put your child to bed with a bottle. By 7 or 8 months of age, most children no longer need feedings during the night. Children who drink bottles while lying down also may be more prone to getting ear infections.

- Only give your baby a bottle during meals. Do not use the bottle as a pacifier; do not allow your child to walk around with it or to drink it for extended periods. These practices not only may lead to BBTD, but children can suffer tooth injuries if they fall while sucking on a bottle.
- Teach your child to drink from a cup as soon as possible, usually by 1 year of age. Drinking from a cup does not cause the liquid to collect around the teeth, and a cup cannot be taken to bed. If you are concerned that a cup may be messier than a bottle, especially when you are away from home, use one that has a snap-on lid with a straw or a special valve to prevent spilling.
- If your child must have a bottle for long periods, fill it only with water.

Keeping your baby's mouth clean is also important in preventing tooth decay. After feedings, gently brush your baby's gums and any baby teeth with a soft infant toothbrush.

Start using water and a soft child-sized toothbrush for daily cleanings once your child has seven to eight teeth. By the time your toddler is 2 years of age, you should be brushing her teeth once or twice a day, preferably after breakfast and before bedtime.

Begin using a fluoride toothpaste when you are sure the toothpaste will not be swallowed (usually when your child is around 3 years of age). Use a pea-sized amount of toothpaste to limit the amount your child can swallow. Too much fluoride can be harmful to a child.

### Detect Decay Early

Baby Bottle Tooth Decay first shows up as white spots on the upper front teeth. These spots are hard to see at first—even for a pediatrician or dentist—without proper equipment. A child with tooth decay needs to get treatment early to stop the decay from spreading and to prevent lasting damage to the teeth.

If you are concerned that your child may have BBTD, your pediatrician can refer you to a pediatric dentist who will carefully examine your child's teeth for signs of decay.

With the right balance of proper home and professional dental care, your child can grow up to have healthy teeth for a lifetime of smiles.

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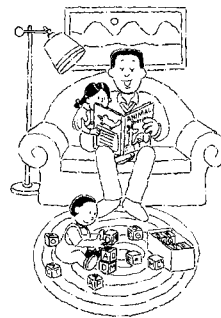
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# Helping Your Child Learn to Read



Does your child listen closely during story time? Does your child like to look through books and magazines? Does your child like learning the names of letters? If the answer is “yes” to any of these questions, your child may have already learned some important early reading skills and may be ready to learn some of the basics of reading. This brochure gives tips on how to make reading a family tradition and how to help your child develop a love of learning.

## Reading tips

The following are a few tips to keep in mind as your child learns to read:

- Set aside time every day to read together. Many children like to have stories read to them at bedtime. This is a great way to wind down after a busy day and get ready for sleep.
- Leave books in your child's room for her to enjoy on her own. Make sure her room is reading-friendly with a comfortable bed or chair, bookshelf, and reading lamp.
- Read books that your child enjoys. After a while, your child may learn the words to her favorite book. When this happens, let your child complete the sentences or take turns reciting the words.
- Do not drill your child on letters, numbers, colors, shapes, or words. Instead, make a game out of it and find ways to encourage your child's curiosity and interests.

## Start the process early

A child as young as 6 months of age can begin to enjoy books. The following are some age-by-age activities to help your young child learn language and begin to make the connection between words and meaning:

### Birth to 1 year of age

- Play frequently with your baby. Talk, sing, recite rhymes, and do finger plays. This helps your baby learn spoken language and builds a strong foundation for reading.
- Talk with your baby, making eye contact. Allow time for your baby to respond before moving on to the next idea.
- Give your baby board books or soft books to look at, chew on, or bang on the table.
- Look at picture books with your baby and name the objects that he sees. Say things like “See the baby!” or “Look at the puppy!”
- Snuggle with your baby on your lap and read aloud to him. He may not understand the story, but he will love to hear the sound of your voice and the rhythm of the language.

### 1 to 3 years of age

- Read to your child every day. Allow your child to pick which books he wants, even if he picks the same one time and time again!
- Let your child “read” to you by naming objects in the book or making up a story.

- Make regular trips to the library with your child. Most children find it very exciting to get a library card. Make this moment something to celebrate.
- Continue to talk, sing, recite rhymes, and play with your child.

### 3 to 5 years of age

- By 3 to 5 years of age, most children are just beginning to learn the alphabet—singing their ABCs, knowing the letters of their names. Read alphabet books with your child and point out letters as you read.
- Help your child recognize whole words as well as letters. Learning and remembering what words look like are the first steps to learning to read. Point out common, everyday things like the letters on a stop sign or the logo on a favorite restaurant.
- As you read together, ask your child to make up his own story about what is happening in the book. Keep reading a part of your child's bedtime routine.
- Some educational television shows, videos, and computer programs can help your child learn to read. They can also make learning fun. But you need to be involved, too. If your child is watching *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* or *Sesame Street*, for example, sit and talk about what the program is trying to teach. Limit screen time to no more than 1 or 2 hours per day of educational, nonviolent programs.
- If possible, give your child a subscription to a children's magazine. Children love getting mail, and it is something they can read as well!
- Provide opportunities for your child to use written language for many purposes. Write shopping lists together. Compose letters to send to friends or relatives.

## Reading aloud with your child

Reading books aloud is one of the best ways you can help your child learn to read. This can be fun for you, too. The more excitement you show when you read a book, the more your child will enjoy it. The most important thing to remember is to let your child set her own pace and have fun at whatever she is doing. Do the following when reading to your child:

- Run your finger under the words as you read to show your child that the print carries the story.
- Use funny voices and animal noises. Do not be afraid to ham it up! This will help your child get excited about the story.
- Stop to look at the pictures; ask your child to name things she sees in the pictures. Talk about how the pictures relate to the story.
- Invite your child to join in whenever there is a repeated phrase in the text.
- Show your child how events in the book are similar to events in your child's life.
- If your child asks a question, stop and answer it. The book may help your child express her thoughts and solve her own problems.
- Keep reading to your child even after she learns to read. A child can listen and understand more difficult stories than she can read on her own.

## Listening to your child read aloud

Once your child begins to read, have him read out loud. This can help build your child's confidence in his ability to read and help him enjoy learning new skills. Take turns reading with your child to model more advanced reading skills.

If your child asks for help with a word, give it right away so that he does not lose the meaning of the story. Do not force your child to sound out the word. On the other hand, if your child wants to sound out a word, do not stop him.

If your child substitutes one word for another while reading, see if it makes sense. If your child uses the word "dog" instead of "pup," for example, the meaning is the same. Do not stop the reading to correct him. If your child uses a word that makes no sense (such as "road" for "read"), ask him to read the sentence again because you are not sure you understand what has just been read. Recognize your child's energy limits. Stop each session at or before the earliest signs of fatigue or frustration.

Most of all, make sure you give your child lots of praise! You are your child's first, and most important, teacher. The praise and support you give your child as he learns to read will help him enjoy reading and learning even more.

## Learning to read in school

Most children learn to read by 6 or 7 years of age. Some children learn at 4 or 5 years of age. Even if a child has a head start, she may not stay ahead once school starts. The other students most likely will catch up during the second or third grade. Pushing your child to read before she is ready can get in the way of your child's interest in learning. Children who really enjoy learning are more likely to do well in school. This love of learning cannot be forced.

As your child begins elementary school, she will begin her formal reading education. There are many ways to teach children to read. One way emphasizes word recognition and teaches children to understand a whole word's meaning by how it is used. Learning which sounds the letters represent—phonics—is another way children learn to read. Phonics is used to help "decode" or sound out words. Focusing on the connections between the spoken and written word is another technique. Most teachers use a combination of methods to teach children how to read.

Reading is an important skill for children to learn. Most children learn to read without any major problems. Pushing a child to learn before she is ready can make learning to read frustrating. But reading together and playing games with books make reading fun. Parents need to be involved in their child's learning. Encouraging a child's love of learning will go a long way to ensuring success in school.

The American Academy of Pediatrics gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the Reach Out and Read program in the development of this brochure. Reach Out and Read is a pediatric early literacy program that makes literacy promotion and giving out books part of pediatric primary care. This program is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. For more information about Reach Out and Read, please contact the program at

Reach Out and Read  
National Center  
29 Mystic Ave  
Somerville, MA 02145  
617/629-8042  
[www.reachoutandread.org](http://www.reachoutandread.org)

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American Academy of Pediatrics  
PO Box 747  
Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0747  
Web site — <http://www.aap.org>

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## Dyslexia

Does your child reverse letters or numbers or see them upside down? Does he read very slowly, really struggle to decode words, or continually misspell fairly simple words?

Most children have these problems when they are first learning to read. However, if no improvements are made over several years, these problems may be a sign of *dyslexia*, a reading disorder. Today, dyslexia is easier to identify than other learning problems. Talk to your pediatrician if, by 7 years of age, your child often does the following:

- Confuses the order of letters in words
- Does not look carefully at all the letters in a word, guessing what the word is from the first letter
- Loses his place on a page while reading, sometimes in the middle of a line
- Reads word by word, struggling with almost every one of them
- Reads very slowly and tires easily from reading

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

## From your doctor