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How to Keep Your Baby Healthy

Most babies have their first checkup within the first few days after birth. Even when things are going well, frequent checkups are an important way to monitor your child's growth and development.

Preventive care includes a schedule of routine visits to the doctor's office for periodic check-ups and immunizations. The following is a recommended schedule to maintain your child's health and well-being: Newborn – within 2-4 days, then between 2-4 weeks of age, next at ages - 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, and 24 months of age; then at 3, 4, 5, 6 years of age, 8 and 10 years of age, and then yearly.

Your doctor may recommend alternatives to this program based on your child's specific needs and history of health or illness in your family.

Be sure to talk with your child's health care provider about ways to keep your child healthy and to avoid illness.

Most well-baby checkups begin with measurements of your baby's length, weight and head circumference.

These measurements will be plotted on a growth chart. You'll see how your baby's size compares with that of other babies the same age — but don't fixate on the percentages. What's most important is steady growth from one visit to the next.

During the appointment, the doctor or nurse practitioner will ask how things are going. Be ready to describe a typical day with your baby. The doctor or nurse practitioner will also discuss safety issues, such as placing your baby to sleep on his or her back, using a rear-facing infant car seat and baby-proofing your home. Although breast milk or formula will be the main part of your baby's diet throughout the first year, you'll also talk about when to introduce solid foods.

You'll have many questions of your own as well. Nothing is too trivial when it comes to caring for your child. And remember your own health. If you're feeling depressed, stressed out or run-down, describe what's happening. Your child's doctor is there to help you, too.

Immunizations are one of the best ways to protect children from a multitude of serious diseases. Children in the United States routinely get vaccines that protect them from more than a dozen diseases. Some vaccines are given in combination with others. Most vaccines require multiple doses given at various intervals. For the sake of your child's health, take the time to understand the benefits and risks of vaccines.

Lab tests aren't needed at most well-baby exams. If lead poisoning is a possibility, a blood test may be done to measure the amount of lead in your baby's blood. If your baby

lives with anyone who's at risk of tuberculosis, a tuberculosis skin test may be recommended.

Depending on the age and medical history of your child the following are general recommendations: hereditary/metabolic screening (to check for inherited diseases), hematocrit or hemoglobin (tests to check for anemia), vision and hearing exams, dental exams, and blood pressure screening.

Make sure you know when to schedule your child's next appointment — and how to reach the doctor should you have question or concerns. Ask if the doctor's office or clinic offers a 24-hour nurse information service. Knowing help is available when you need it can offer precious peace of mind.