

# TALKING IS TEACHING | COMMUNITY OUTREACH

## Health and Wellness

At first, it may not seem like health and wellness have much to do with talking, reading and singing, but the truth is there are many ways that these concepts are connected!

**The brain is the most important organ in your child's body, and doctors know that the best way to support the growth of the brain in the first few years of life is by surrounding it with lots of things to hear, see and feel!** In fact, over a hundred of our Tulsa doctors feel so strongly about this they are giving out books and talking about the importance of reading together at children's check-ups as part of the Reach Out and Read program. Next time you visit your child's doctor, ask them if they have considered giving books out at check-ups!

*Has anyone received a book from your doctor at a check-up? (Feel free to allow parents to say where their child is receiving care. We want to spread the word about our great doctors who feel strongly about this message!)*

Speaking of doctors, one of the best ways to decrease your child's fear of going to visit places like doctor's and dentist's offices is by enjoying books about other children and even animals who have successfully done so. You can then pretend to do the same with your child while at home in a comfortable and safe environment!

*Has anyone watched your child taking care of a stuffed animal's boo-boo or has your toddler tried to kiss your ouchy? (Allow time for parents to share experiences that illustrate pretend play)*

Children process new and even anxiety-provoking events by acting them out and you can join in with your child in this fun activity by pretending to be hurt or by needing them to look in your mouth with a flashlight. The more elaborate your child's pretend play is, the more he can "practice" being in many different situations without fear! This is a fun way to build **language and social skills** starting at a very young age!

Regularly visiting your trusted pediatrician or dentist can help form a wonderful partnership that will **help your child stay healthy and often will prevent medical problems down the road.** You play a key role in your child's healthcare, so make sure you are comfortable with your clinic. Always ask for help if you need a medical form to be explained or need your provider to say something again to you...that's why they are there! And always feel free to write down any questions you may have leading up to your child's appointment. Your doctor wants to partner with you!

From your baby's first newborn exam, your family's doctors want to keep him healthy and strong, and there are always recommended check-up times which usually start in the **first 2 weeks of life.** If you miss a check-up for some reason, always call and reschedule it as

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soon as possible so that you won't miss important information for your child's age or immunizations which will protect your little one from deadly diseases.

**The first dental visit is recommended around one year of age**, when those first teeth usually start coming in, and the best way to keep your infant's teeth healthy is to stop using the bottle at that time. **When babies go to sleep with a baby bottle or when toddlers carry around sippy cups with juice, it allows bacteria to cause cavities very early in little mouths.** Give them water between mealtimes to keep them healthy and hydrated!

To keep your child healthy, think about the **food** she is eating! Be sure and discuss your desires for feeding your infant with your doctor, as there are different needs of each family, but as your child starts eating with the family, **always include fruit and vegetable options to help your child** "eat all the colors of the rainbow!" Red tomatoes, orange carrot slices, yellow bell pepper, blueberries, green apples, purple grapes (all cut into small pieces to prevent choking, of course!) can start a healthy habit of choosing foods that have high nutritional value and provide a variety of vitamins and nutrients! **Mealtime is a great time to talk to your little one and describe what you are preparing and eating together.** You might say, "I'm chopping up this crunchy orange carrot for your blue bowl!" Or you might ask your toddler to describe what is on his plate, adding to the things he says with more descriptive words, such as, "You're right! You do have a green bean on your plate...a crunchy, long green bean! Can you think of an animal that might eat green beans out of a garden?"

When children are involved in helping pick out foods in the grocery, preparing the meal and setting the table with you, they are often more likely to try the new things they have seen and touched. Next time you go to the grocery, go on a scavenger hunt for something green, or something round. Have your preschooler help you find a label that starts with the letter "B," and so on.

*Can anyone think of other ways to allow your child to be a part of planning and preparing meals? (allow time for responses...may want to prompt with other questions of ideas for kid-friendly, healthy snacks and meals)*

Staying active is another great way to keep your little one healthy. Even when it seems hot or cold outside, it's a great idea to spend some times outdoors, exploring and playing together! On really hot days, consider going outside before 10 AM or in the evening, and make sure that you and your child wear protective sunscreen during the hot part of the day. When it is cold, just bundle your little one up, and enjoy going outside, even if it is only for a short window of time. Kids all over the world enjoy playing outside in the cold and snow, and **there is no scientific evidence that cold weather causes illness.**

**Another big part of being healthy is giving your body the rest it needs!** Children often become cranky or even very overactive when they aren't receiving enough sleep.

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When babies are first born, they sleep almost all the time, with brief periods of wakefulness, which over time, become longer and longer until they begin to establish a pattern of napping. **Toddlers need 11-14 hours of sleep a day, and preschoolers need 10-13 hours per day!** Each child is a little different, but on average, children don't often receive all the sleep they need, which leads to a chronic sleep deprivation for their bodies. **Good sleep habits often start with routines** that include activities that signal to your child's brain that naptime or bedtime is coming soon. These signals might include taking a relaxing bath with songs and counting of baby toes, brushing teeth, rocking and singing lullabies and looking at a book together.

*Has anyone experienced difficulty with sleep habits that improved with a consistent routine...or does anyone want to share good ideas for bedtime routines? (allow time for responses)*

Research has shown us a few things that we know are not good for good sleep habits. **Screen time, which includes TV and video games, before bedtime has been shown to make it more difficult for little brains to go to sleep!** In fact, the Academy of Pediatrics recommends that babies not watch screens until they are at least **eighteen months old, and only then in small amounts and with parental participation** (for example, asking questions about what you see while watching a cartoon together). While it may seem tough, limiting the viewing of screens to no more than **one hour per day for children 2 years and older is recommended.** Researchers don't fully understand all the changes that take place inside the growing brain when it is exposed to hours of screen time each day, but we do know that **children learn best when they are active participants with others in talking, reading, singing and playing!**

Healthy children grow into healthy adults, so let's work together to build strong brains and bodies! Take advantage of establishing healthy habits with your child early, and make the most of everyday moments to talk, sing and read and play together!