

a guide to your child's growth



- Why is growth so important?
- Working with your child's doctor
- Being clear about your next steps

measure height measure health



why is growth so important?

A child's growth is much more than just how tall he or she is. Growth is an important indicator of overall health and well-being.

That's why it is essential that you are actively involved and aware of your child's height, weight and growth rate. Asking your child's doctor to measure your child regularly and to plot those measurements on a growth chart are important ways to track if your child is growing normally.

It is even more important to measure and plot your child's growth if he or she was born small for gestational age (SGA). Children born SGA are those whose length, weight or both are lower than the normal range according to the appropriate growth chart. Most babies born SGA catch-up to their peers by age 2 without medical intervention—but about 10% of them do not. Such children are seven times more likely to be short as adults and are at risk for certain health problems throughout life.

If your child is not growing as he or she should, it is important that his or her doctor identifies the reason as soon as possible because a medical condition may be slowing or stopping their growth.

If you are worried that your child may be growing more slowly than his or her classmates or siblings, this leaflet is designed to provide you with the information you need to have an informed discussion with your child's doctor.

Take a look at the checklist below. If you answer 'yes' to one of the questions, ask your child's doctor specifically to look at your child's growth.

- Is your child shorter than his or her peers or classmates?
- Is your child growing more slowly than his or her peers or classmates?
- Is your child shorter than you were at that age?

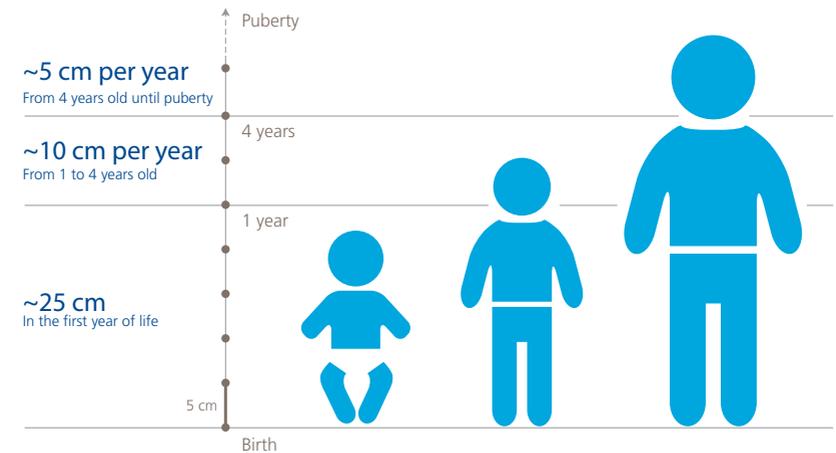




normal growth in children

To help you detect if your child may have a growth issue, it is helpful to understand the normal growth pattern. One guide doctors use is called the 'rule of fives'. This suggests that babies typically grow about 25 cm in the first year of life. From ages 1 to 4, they grow at a rate of about 10 cm per year. Growth slows to a rate of about 5 cm per year from the age of 4 until puberty. During puberty, there will be a period of rapid growth, called the pubertal growth spurt. A child's growth is generally limited after puberty ends, so it is important to uncover any growth issues as early as possible to maximise growth potential.

Growth rates throughout childhood* 'The Rule of Fives'



* Growth rates in a healthy child can vary substantially around these approximations.

what can cause slower growth?

There are several reasons why a child may not be growing as fast as his or her classmates or siblings. Some are entirely harmless and do not affect the health of your child. For example, some children simply grow at a slower rate than others but will eventually catch-up as they get older.

However, there are other more serious reasons why your child might not be growing properly. These reasons can range from being born SGA to poor nutrition to certain diseases, e.g. conditions affecting the kidneys or the liver. It may even be that a child's body is not making enough growth hormone, the hormone responsible for making them grow. That is why it is so important to talk to a doctor the moment you suspect there may be something wrong with the way your child is growing.



working with your child's doctor

how will your child's doctor evaluate his or her growth?

Regular measuring and plotting on a growth chart is key to identifying if your child has a growth issue. Ensure that your child is measured and weighed and the results are plotted by his or her doctor regularly. If an issue with growth is suspected, or if your child was born SGA, he or she should be measured and weighed every 6 months by the doctor. Children born SGA should be measured and weighed more often—every 3 months—in the first year of life.

At each visit, your child's doctor should measure his or her:

- length (if under the age of 2) or height (age 2 or older)
- weight
- head circumference (the distance around the head measured just above the eyebrows; up to age 3–4)

Once a growth problem has been identified, your child's doctor may run some tests to find out what's causing the problem. At this point you should discuss with your child's doctor if there is a medical issue that may require seeing a specialist.

questions to ask the doctor

Ask your child's doctor to explain the measurements that have been taken, and if these measurements suggest a problem with your child's growth. Make sure to ask what percentile your child's measurements fall into, and also your child's growth velocity. Ask if your child should see a specialist.

referral to a specialist

what to expect when your child is referred

Depending on what your child's doctor determines may be the cause behind your child's growth problem, referral to a specialist may be needed.

The specialist may then carry out certain tests to find out what the problem is and make an official diagnosis. All of this takes time, so frequent monitoring and early referral is very important to ensure any issue with your child's growth is identified as soon as possible. The sooner your child is referred and diagnosed, the sooner the problem can be addressed and your child can reach their full growth potential.



next step

When your child is referred and diagnosed by a specialist, it is important that you understand as much about your child's diagnosis as possible. Here are some practical questions you may want to ask the doctor.

- What has my child been diagnosed with?
- How long will my child have this condition?
- What will the impact of this condition be on my child's life?
- What can I do as a parent to manage my child's condition?
- Will my child need to have treatment and what will the treatment involve?



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