



STAYING HEALTHY AT ANY AGE

Caring for your Child's Health

Caring for the health and wellbeing of your child is a big responsibility. Learn more about good nutrition, development, common illnesses and how Barwon Health can help...

Immunisations

Immunisation is a safe and effective way of protecting children against certain diseases. Immunisation protects children (and adults) against harmful infections before they come into contact with them in the community. Vaccines protect by using the body's own defence mechanism to build up resistance to specific infections. In Australia routine infant vaccinations are scheduled at birth, 2, 4, 6, 12, 18 months and 4 yrs of age.

Food & Nutrition

Parents want to ensure their child has the best start in life and a focus on breastfeeding is great for your baby. According to the World Health Organisation and health experts, breast milk is all your baby needs until six months of age. If you cannot breastfeed, it is comforting to know that today's milk formulas provide the basic building blocks of growth. Infant formulas are the only safe alternative to breast milk.

In terms of introducing solids, as a guide you can start slowly introducing solids at around six months, however all babies are different. It is important to remember that children watch what you are eating, so you can help them adopt good eating habits by eating well yourself. Some children reject a new food 6-10 times before they taste it and love it. Eat it enthusiastically yourself and, if it is still rejected, try it with your child again in a few weeks or a few months. There is no hurry but don't give up as their tastes can change.

Physical Activity & Obesity

Australian children are growing fatter at a rapid rate. The number of overweight children has doubled in recent years. Causes of obesity in children include unhealthy food choices, lack of physical activity and poor family eating habits. This rise in the number of overweight children is disturbing because it causes long term health problems and can also lead to social problems, as overweight children are more likely to be teased by their peers.

There's a lot parents can do to help their children reach and maintain a healthy weight. The main influence on the diet and lifestyle of children is parents. Simple techniques in the home can have a dramatic effect on reducing childhood weight and obesity problems, including getting good nutrition advice, stocking the fridge and pantry with healthy snacks and food and become more active together as a family.

Dental Care

Good oral hygiene is important for babies and children to ensure healthy teeth and gums. During childhood eating, drinking and oral hygiene habits are established, so it is important for parents to encourage healthy behaviours that can contribute to good oral health and overall wellbeing.

Development & Behaviour

Development is a journey, not a race. All babies and children develop in the same order but at completely different rates. Your baby's everyday life affects how his/her brain develops. Lots of love, attention and interesting experiences do wonders for his/her brain growth, learning and development.

Babies and children are born to experiment and their behaviour is part of an innocent learning process. As a parent, you will just need to create a safe environment for exploration with clear boundaries. Start with keeping things you don't want touched, out of reach. Eventually, you can tell your baby which things are off limits. It is important to remember that the word 'discipline' actually means 'to teach' and not necessarily to punish. Smacking is not an effective form of punishment, as children need the opportunity to learn about related consequences or solve their own problems.

If you have any concerns or questions about your child's development or behaviour, speak with your GP or maternal & child health nurse.

Common Illnesses

There are many common illnesses that affect babies and children including ear infections, colds, asthma, fever and gastroenteritis. How do you know when your child's illness is minor and when it might be more serious? Recent research has pointed to signs that may indicate that a doctor should see your baby or young child immediately. Signs of illness to watch out for:

- drowsiness
- decreased activity or lethargy
- breathing difficulty
- poor circulation
- poor feeding
- poor urine output.

The more of these signs your baby or young child has, the more chance there is that they have a potentially serious illness. See your doctor if any one of these signs is present in your child. You might put off seeing the doctor for all kinds of reasons - you may not want to worry the doctor, with what may turn out to be a trivial illness, especially at night, or if you think that the doctor is very busy. The doctor's job isn't just to diagnose and treat illness. Doctors are also there to reassure you that your child is well.

Sun Care

For vitamin D, children need as little as 15 minutes of sun each day. In Australia, the sun's burning UV radiation is strongest from September to April, between 10 am and 3 pm. So try to plan outdoor activities for early morning and late afternoon. Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. Sunscreen, a wide brimmed hat, protective clothing and shade are the best ways to stop sunburn.

Sleeping Problems

Few topics in parenting are as important or controversial as the management of sleep problems. Sleep problems can be chronic and very distressing for parents of young children. Tired parents in need of help are likely to encounter a diverse range of opinions when they seek information or consult professionals. But what does the research say about effectively managing sleep problems?

For children over the age of 6 months, behavioural strategies have been found to be the most successful in dealing with sleeping problems including creating a positive routine, controlled comforting (or controlled crying), systematic ignoring and scheduled waking.

How can Barwon Health help?

Immunisation

Barwon Health Immunisation Service (working under contract to City of Greater Geelong) provides a free immunisation service for all vaccines on the National Immunisation Program Schedule. The service is staffed by caring Accredited Nurse Immunisers with a wealth of knowledge and experience and operates from 5 convenient locations throughout the Geelong region (Belmont, Corio, Newtown, Newcomb, Ocean Grove and central Geelong). For timetable details and general enquiries, please phone 5226 7176.

Maternity & Breastfeeding Services

Different models of pregnancy and postnatal care are available at Barwon Health. For more information, contact Baxter Maternity Services on 5226 7511.

Lactation consultants provide support and advice to families experiencing breastfeeding difficulties for babies up to 10 weeks of age. This free service is provided at Geelong Hospital three days a week. Please phone 5226 7511 for appointments.

Community Health Centres

Barwon Health has five major community health centres that provide a range of services to the Geelong region. For more information, contact your nearest centre:

Anglesea	11 McMillan Street	5260 3901
Belmont	1-17 Reynolds Road	5260 3778
Corio	2 Gellibrand Street	5260 3800
Newcomb	104-108 Bellarine Hwy	5260 3333
Torquay	100 Surfcoast Hwy	5260 3900

Where to get more information & help

- Your doctor
- Your maternal & child health nurse
- 24 hour 'Nurse on Call' 1300 606 024
- Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- Raising Children Network www.raisingchildren.net.au

Sources: Barwon Health, Better Health Channel, Department of Human Services, Raising Children Network, Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Royal Children's Hospital, Dental Services Victoria

"Staying healthy at any age" is a five part health promotion series produced quarterly by Barwon Health, promoting health services available in the Geelong region and is an initiative of the Barwon Health Community Engagement Committee. For more information or for copies of the fact sheets, please visit our website www.barwonhealth.org.au or contact 03 5226 7111

