



Importance of Yearly Exams in Children and Adolescents

By Ashley Hineman, M.D.

Many parents understand the importance of bringing their infants and toddlers in to see the doctor. Young children visit their doctor frequently during the first few years of life to make sure they are developing appropriately and to receive vaccinations. Some parents stop bringing their children in for yearly visits after the age of five. It is at this age where yearly exams become critically important in assessing your child's health. The American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics both recommend yearly "well check-up visits". It is at these visits where your pediatrician will assess your child's health and may uncover problems that can be treated much more effectively than if discovered later in life.

Annual well child visits are extremely important in school-aged children. They allow parents time to ask questions that may be hard to discuss during sick visits. Many children struggle in school due to learning or behavioral problems, such as ADHD. Without annual exams these diagnoses may be missed or delayed causing significant long-term consequences.

During these yearly exams your pediatrician should:

- Check your child's vital signs (including blood pressure)

- Measure and plot their weight and height on growth charts
- Discuss your child's BMI (Body Mass Index)
- Perform a full exam (including assessment of pubertal development)
- Review recommended immunizations
- Perform vision and hearing screening
- Discuss any recommended screening tests including blood and urine analysis (for example, screens for early diabetes, thyroid problems, high cholesterol, and anemia)
- Review your child's school performance, and perform behavioral/developmental screens
- Offer additional resources about your child's development and health

Adolescence is a time of rapid developmental changes. As your child grows into a pre-teen and teenager annual visits will prepare your family for the upcoming transitions. You will have the resources needed to discuss these changes with your child. In addition, there are several new immunizations that are recommended for adolescents. Your doctor will discuss the risks and benefits associated with them. Your pediatrician should advise your child on healthy eating habits, exercise, and weight management. They will assess your child's emotional and social development and offer guidance on discussing risky

behaviors and peer pressure they may be facing. They can perform sports physical evaluations that help prevent sports injuries.

The best medicine is preventative medicine. Yearly visits allow you to develop good partnerships between your pediatrician and your family. They help insure that your child stays healthy as they continue to grow. Prior to your annual visit make a list of important items you would like your pediatrician to know about or any questions or concerns that you would like to discuss. Let your pediatrician be your child's advocate.

Call your pediatrician to schedule your child's yearly examination today!

This article is for educational purposes only and should not be considered to be medical advice. It is not a substitution for a visit with your doctor. All medical information is incomplete without a physical exam, which isn't possible without a visit to your doctor. See your pediatrician and have your child evaluated to determine whether your child is due for their yearly check-up.

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