

PREPARING YOUR TODDLER FOR MEDICAL VISITS



Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Going to new places, like the doctor's office, can feel scary or stressful for young children. Even though doctor visits help keep toddlers healthy, they can be hard for both you and your toddler. This can be even harder if your toddler has a medical condition. These visits can change your daily routine and feel overwhelming (like it is too much or too stressful).

If your child has felt pain or discomfort during past visits, they may remember and feel nervous again. Some kids may cry, scream, or will not listen. Others may cling to you, whine, or demand things. These reactions are normal, but they can be tough. Know that you're not alone. The **Early Connections team** has some tips to help you and your toddler feel better during medical visits. You're doing a great job!



How Can You Prepare Yourself?

- **Plan ahead.** Think about how the visit may change your child's day. If it affects nap time, try to shift the schedule a few days before.
- **Know what to expect.** Is it a regular check-up or will your child get a shot or test? If you know what to expect, it helps you prepare your child.
- **Write down questions.** Make a list or voice note of things you want to ask the doctor. Make sure to add questions from other family members too.
- **Check your feelings.** If you feel nervous, take deep breaths to feel more calm. Your child can sense your emotions. When you feel more calm, they feel safer.

How Can You Prepare Your Child?

- **Talk about the visit ahead of time.** Use simple words and reminders like, "First we'll go to the library, then to the doctor." Or, "We're getting dressed to go to the doctor. We can stop to look at the fish when we're done."
- **Be honest.** Don't say you're going somewhere else if you're really going to the doctor. This can make your child feel confused or scared.
- **Use toys and books.**
 - Have your child play with medical kits, dolls, or stuffed animals ahead of the visit.
 - Let your child play out the medical visit. For example, you and your child can pretend to check each other's ears and listen to your heart.
 - Read stories about going to the doctor. Talk about how the characters feel and how they stay calm.



How Can You Help Your Child in Emergency Medical Visits?

Sometimes, you don't have time to prepare. You can still use many of these tips. Take care of yourself and connect with your toddler to help them feel safe.

- **Stay calm.** Take slow, deep breaths to help you focus.
- **Use self-talk.** Tell yourself: "I'm doing my best to help my child feel safe."
- **Describe the place.** "We were going to a party, but your tummy hurts. We're at the doctor's office now. It's cold here, but I have your blanket."
- **Stay calm together.** Sing a quiet song, read a book, or color.
- **Talk to a friend** or family member you trust. It's okay to need and ask for support.

How Can You Help Your Child During the Medical Visit?

- **Use simple words.** Explain what is going on. Watch your child's body language and listen to what they say.
- **Name their feelings.** Say things like, "I see you're feeling nervous. Let's practice our belly breathing. When it's done, we can go look at the fish."
- **Try ways to help stay calm.** Try deep breathing together: "Let's blow out a candle." Or count together: "Let's count to 10."
- **Bring comfort items.** Their favorite toy or blanket can help.
- **Do calming activities.** Sing a song, look at a book, or play a quiet game.
- **Give choices.** Ask the doctor or nurse if your child can choose something, like the color of a bandage or the arm on which they get the shot.
- **Don't say things that aren't true.** Such as "it won't hurt" or "you're not going to get a shot."
- **Offer support.** Say, "I'm here with you. I'll hold your hand while the doctor listens to your heart."
- **Soothe and re-connect.** Use gentle touch and kind words: "You were brave. The nurse helped you, and now it's all done."
- **If your child needs a shot,** watch these videos from the Meg Foundation about how to reduce crying and pain: [Resources for Babies & Toddlers \(0-2\)](#)
- **Don't hold your child down,** but try these comfort positions: [Comfort Positioning Guide](#)
- **Ask questions.** If you're not sure about anything, make sure to ask questions. It's important to leave understanding your baby's needs and a plan for future visits.



Where can I find online resources for more support?



Tips from the Meg Foundation

Comfort for Babies Infographic

<https://www.megfoundationforpain.org/creating-comfort-for-babies-infographic/>



Comfort Positioning Poster

<https://www.megfoundationforpain.org/comfort-positioning-poster/>



Resources for Babies/Toddler 0-2

<https://www.megfoundationforpain.org/resources-for-babies-toddlers-0-2/>



How to Prepare Your Baby For Doctor's Visits – Challenges and Tips

Source: Being The Parent

<https://www.beingtheparent.com/how-to-prepare-your-baby-for-doctors-visits-challenges-and-tips/>

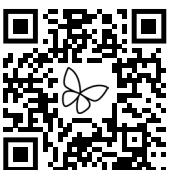
How Can You Help Your Child After the Medical Visit?

- Try not to have lots of activities on days when you have a medical visit. This will give you time to reconnect with your child. Talk, cuddle, or play in ways that make you both happy.
- If your child has a lot of medical visits, do a fun activity each time you are on the way out of the hospital. This can help them connect going to the doctor with doing something they enjoy, such as:
 - Looking at the fish tank
 - Getting a special snack from the vending machine
 - Playing in the playground
- Your child may be more fussy or tired than usual after a medical visit. They may need extra attention from you. Give them choices to help them feel in control again. For example, let them choose a snack, or choose if they want to cuddle on the couch or play with you.

When Should You Ask for Extra Help?

It's normal for children to feel scared or worried during doctor visits. Most get back to feeling better quickly with your support. Over time, they learn what to expect and how to cope (deal with it).

Talk to your care team if your child continues to have medical needs or strong reactions that make visits harder. There are experts who can help (such as child life specialists, social workers, infant mental health experts, or pediatric psychologists). They can help make things easier for you and your child.



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