

11. Medical Concerns & Tips

46. All babies need to be checked frequently by a pediatrician or family doctor within their first few months. Many problems are correctable if they are identified early. Children can be checked less frequently but should still be seen every two to three months when they are small or if they are having problems.

Jared, a five-month-old baby, was brought in by his parents for a check-up because they were concerned he didn't seem to be developing normally. The baby had not been seen by a doctor since his birth and had been delivered by a midwife. I was greatly concerned when I examined Jared. He was listless, pale, had dry skin, and was also constipated, according to his parents. I suspected the thyroid gland was not functioning properly and this had resulted in low thyroid production (hypothyroidism). The baby also appeared to be anemic. Lab tests proved both to be true.

Once thyroid medication and iron were started, Jared gradually began to develop normally and lose all signs of hypothyroidism and anemia. If the parents had waited to see a doctor much longer, their son could have been permanently damaged intellectually.

47. It is important for a baby or little child to be seen by a baby doctor if there is:

- Poor weight gain or loss
- Poor suck in an infant
- Decreased appetite

- Little movement or listlessness
- Breathing problems
- A yellow color to the skin or eyes
- Oozing or infection around the navel
- Pus oozing from the eyes
- High-pitched or non-stop crying
- No initial bowel movement or wet diapers
- Your instincts say something is wrong
- Diarrhea
- Elevated temperature

48. Immunizations are important to give according to the schedule your pediatrician gives you. No connection has been established between autism and immunizations. Mumps, whooping cough and other childhood diseases are being seen again and can cause severe disability or deaths if infants and children are not protected. (See immunization chart in Appendix.) Tuberculin skin tests are important every one to two years. In states such as California, where there is an increased incidence of tuberculosis, yearly skin tests are wise. If a child is found to have tuberculosis within the first year and it is not detected for two years, a delay in treatment could be serious. (You may have to insist your child receives a TB skin test. Some doctors are lax in giving these.)

49. Medical Tips:

- **If your baby has an obstructed tear duct**, try massage and warm compresses for several days before allowing the duct to be surgically opened. Gentle massage for a few days at the inner corner of the eye will often open an obstructed tear duct.
- **Boy babies can develop a large collection of a cheesy substance called smega** under their foreskin. By gently pulling back or retracting the foreskin, if this is possible, smega can be removed. Baby girls also may have a cheesy material between the folds of the labia. Sometimes,

in the early days they can have a little vaginal discharge and even a little vaginal bleeding.

I was asked to consult about a baby boy in a hospital intensive care unit, and as I was doing an examination, I noticed a large swelling around the tip of the baby's penis. I assumed it was an accumulation of smegma and asked the nurse to bring me some gauze squares. By gently pulling back the baby's foreskin, I removed the smegma. Two pediatric residents were watching me and seemed horrified by what I had done. When I asked them why they were upset, one said "Dr. A, the head of the ICU, said the swelling around the penis was due to a tumor." I tried to keep from laughing and explained what smegma was and that it was not a tumor! (I was never Dr. A's favorite consultant after that.)

- **New babies may have a milky discharge from the nipples.** The breasts can also be enlarged or engorged in both boy and girl babies. This usually lasts just a short while.
- **An infant or child with a high, unexplained fever should always have a urine specimen checked.** (There are special infant and small child urine collection bags.) Meningitis can also occur in babies and little children and if there is any suspicion of this, a spinal tap needs to be done. This is not a difficult procedure in an infant or child.
- **Q-Tips should never be used in a baby or child's ear.** They can cause damage and push wax down into the ear canal. The external ear can be gently cleaned with a washcloth. A physician can clean an ear canal under direct vision by looking through an otoscope and using an instrument called an ear curet.
- **Bowing of the legs is normal in babies and little children,** but the legs should begin to straighten out once a child starts walking. A difference in leg lengths is important to notice in babies, particularly in girls, because this could be due to a congenital dislocation of the hip. If this is identified early, the hip can be treated and corrected.

- **Babies and little children may develop flatness of the head** because of sleeping on their back. Once they start moving around and turning over, this should disappear. There are some congenital abnormalities of the head that do need treatment. Special helmets have been devised for some of the abnormalities and once in a while surgery will be needed, but this is rare. Helmets have now proved to not make a difference in the shape of a baby's head.
- **Most hemangiomas, which are red and raised small, soft collections of blood vessels get smaller or will disappear as a child grows older.** A pediatric dermatologist always needs to be consulted before a physician does anything to one of these. Otherwise severe scarring may result. Most large port wine stains on the face can be treated with a laser when a child is older. You might want to get one or two opinions about the time to do this.
- **Any baby who is not making sounds by three months of age** should have a hearing exam by a qualified hearing professional. Older children with frequent ear infections and delayed speech should also have their hearing checked in a pediatric hearing center. Thirty-eight states mandate that the newborns' hearing must be checked before they leave the hospital. However, there can always be an error in the testing, so if a baby is not making sounds by three months, a repeat testing should be done in a pediatric hearing center, not a doctor's office.
- **Babies who are teething usually don't have elevated temperatures.** They can be fussy and miserable, but should always be checked for an ear infection or other cause. Cold teething rings, rubbing the gums with a clean finger, and teething biscuits all help.
- **An infant or child can have an ear infection without having an elevated temperature.** The child may just be a little fussy or an older child may pull at the ear. A child may also keep his head turned to the side of the infected ear. If a baby or child has a cough or cold, be

sure your doctor checks the ears. Ears are often infected along with a respiratory infection.

- **If a baby boy does not have a good urinary stream** or the opening at the tip of the penis seems to be off-center, the doctor needs to be alerted.
- **Baby boys may have their scrotums filled with fluid.** This is called a hydrocele and is quite common at birth. The fluid usually absorbs by six months.
- **Diaper rash** can usually be cleared by keeping the diaper area as clean as possible and using Zinc oxide ointment or Eucerin's aquafor.
- **Milia** is the term for tiny white spots that occur around the nose in newborns. Spots should disappear in a few days or weeks and need no treatment.
- **Thrush** is a fungus infection in the mouth caused by monilia. It can be treated with special medicine from your doctor. Some diaper rashes are also caused by monilia and have a different appearance from the usual diaper rash. This rash is usually red and raised.