

Making the most of childhood wellness visits

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(HealthDay)—Babies born today will have about a dozen wellness visits by the time they reach age 3. At that point, these checkups typically drop to just once a year, often before kids head back to school.

So it's important to make the most of each visit, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

These visits include a [physical exam](#) as well as developmental, behavioral and learning assessments. They're also your opportunity to ask questions.

With limited time in the exam room, make your list of questions in advance and prioritize them in order of importance. Also, ask any caregivers who spend lots of time with your child if they have [questions](#) or concerns that you should bring up.

Talk about school safety with the pediatrician, including on the playground and in the cafeteria, especially if your child has allergies. And ask about any precautions to take if your youngster plays sports—or wants to.

Go over your child's immunization record and ask about important health vaccines like meningitis and HPV. Discuss how to avoid the growing problem of [childhood obesity](#) and how your child can get more exercise. As your child enters the teen years, expect your doctor to bring up [health issues](#) like drinking, smoking, drugs, [sexual activity](#) and even depression.

Experts warn that you shouldn't leave the office confused about anything that was discussed. If any recommendations are unclear, ask for clarification until you understand what the doctor is saying and why. Finally, check in with the physician's assistant and/or the office nurse—they might be your first point of contact in an emergency.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has [wellness visit checklists](#) from baby's first visit up to age 21 that you can print, fill in and bring with you.

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