

When Should I Call the Doctor?

Many parents are reluctant to call the doctor or nurse practitioner unless they have a powerful reason to do so — like a medical emergency. Mothers and fathers may feel too intimidated to ask questions or express concerns on the phone, or they may feel that they should not take up the time of people who are so busy. But at the same time, both new and experienced parents are learning about their infant and may have concerns about medical and developmental issues; each developmental stage or illness that your child passes through may present different challenges.

With the support of family, friends, and our practice, you will gain a variety of options for handling new situations. One success will build on another, increasing your confidence as the parent of a healthy child who is growing and developing.

Here are some suggestions that may help you and other caregivers decide when to call the doctor or nurse practitioner:

- Ask your doctor or nurse practitioner how he or she feels about addressing parental concerns between well child visits.
- Know the call-in hours for the pediatric practice you are using.
- Know the policy of your insurance company with regard to handling medical emergencies. You may have to contact your primary care clinician.
- It's all right to ask questions and to get reassurance. Mothers and fathers make many decisions every day with regard to the care of their child. It can be helpful to discuss options so that you can make the best choice for you.
- It's all right to call if your child's behavior is different from usual (like excessive crying) and worries you, especially if you suspect that she is unwell.
- It's all right to call if you notice that your child looks different from usual to you — for example, if you notice a skin irritation or rash.

In addition, you should call your doctor or nurse practitioner if your baby:

- Runs a low-grade fever that lasts three or more days
- Runs a fever of over 101 degrees rectally
- Has diarrhea for two or more bowel movements
- Develops a rash
- Has been crying excessively

For more information:

The Disney Encyclopedia of Baby and Child Care edited by Judith Palfrey et al., 1999
What to Expect the First Year by Arlene Eisenberg, Heidi E. Murkoff, and Sandee Eisenberg Hathaway, 1996