



Fact sheet

Centre for Community Child Health

Making the most of child and family health services

Caring for a new baby can be overwhelming, especially for first-time parents. Child and family health services are there to support you and your family and can be a great source of information and support.

At your child and family health service, staff are available to help you and your family provide the best possible start for your child. Between birth and about four years of age, it's a good idea for you to take your child to your local child and family health nurse (or doctor) for regular health checks. Check with your local child and family health service to find your state/territory's schedule of recommended visits. These visits are important because they can help to identify problems and concerns early in your child's life. The visits can also give you an opportunity to check on your own wellbeing.

More than just a health check

As well as checking on your child's growth and development, child and family health services offer support, education and information on:

- breastfeeding
- nutrition
- sleep and settling concerns
- immunisation
- behaviour
- safety
- family planning
- your own physical and emotional wellbeing

(Remember that these visits are not just about your child; they are also a chance to talk about how you are going).

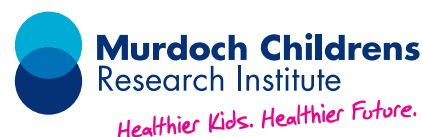
Visits to your child and family health nurse are also a great way to meet other parents in your area — many services run new parent groups and community playgroups. These can be a great opportunity for you to share your experiences and for your child to learn and develop through play. Your service might also run parent education sessions and also be able to put you in contact with additional services.

Tips for parents

- Share what you know about your child's development with your nurse. You are an expert in your child's development and know your child and family best. This means that your knowledge and observations are really important.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help. If your nurse knows your family's needs they are more able to help you.
- Ask questions. If you don't understand your nurse, ask them to explain things differently.
- Work together to come up with ideas and solutions that suit your family.
- Ask your nurse to put you in touch with support services or community groups in your area. These could include a local doctor, early parenting centres, early childhood intervention services, breastfeeding support, family support organisations, and cultural groups.

Centre for Community Child Health

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Healthy food choices and advertising tricks

Childhood overweight and obesity are growing problems in Australia. Recent studies show that almost one in four Australian children is overweight or obese. And as children grow up, doctors are seeing a significant increase in the number of teenagers with signs of insulin resistance and/or pre-diabetes. If these factors are not actively managed, these young people are likely to progress to type 2 diabetes (insulin dependent) and a range of other serious health problems.

Making changes to the way that food is marketed to children has been identified as a key part of a national strategy to help prevent childhood overweight and obesity and later health problems.

'Research shows that parents want their kids to eat healthily,' says Dr Helen Dixon of the Cancer Council Victoria. 'But they are pressed for time, have budget constraints, and find all the different nutrition messages quite confusing.'

It's important for parents to be aware of the persuasive techniques used by advertisers to promote products, including food. Watch out for:

- **Celebrity endorsements**
- **Offers of games and prizes**
- **Special effects, music, repetition and humour**
- **Use of cartoon characters that appeal to children**
- **Incentives and gifts with purchase.** Lots of foods are packaged with a free toy or giveaway, often as part of a series that encourage you to collect them all

- **Nutrition content claims.** Be aware of misleading claims and check nutrition labels to get a clear idea of sugar, fat and salt content

Being aware of these strategies can help you and your child to make healthier food choices.

It's a good idea to try to minimise your child's exposure to the many different sorts of advertising. Before the age of five, children will mostly believe what ads tell them, and also can't tell the difference between an ad and a program. Consider encouraging your child to watch non-commercial children's TV (such as ABC2 or 3), getting DVDs of your child's favourite shows from the library so that they can watch the show without the ads, and minimising the amount of TV they watch overall. And once your child is older, you can help them to learn to think critically about the messages they see in ads.

The Bupa Health Foundation is supporting the Cancer Council Victoria to research the effects of counter-advertising as a way of empowering consumers to evaluate advertised foods more critically and accurately.

The Bupa Health Foundation supports The Royal Children's Hospital Community Paediatric Review.

The Bupa Health Foundation is committed to improving the health of the Australian community and the sustainability of the health system. Too often, good ideas never get the chance to make a difference. The Bupa Health Foundation, with its partnerships in health research and practice, aims to put that right.

Established as a charitable foundation in 2005, the Bupa Health Foundation has partnered in over 80 initiatives nationally, with a combined investment of around \$19 million, across its key focus areas: promoting wellness; managing chronic disease; healthy ageing; empowering people about their health; and keeping healthcare affordable. www.bupa.com.au/foundation

