



A Grandparent's Guide to **KIDS' HEALTH**

In 1946, pediatrician Benjamin Spock published *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*. The 35-cent book had a profound impact on childcare, and revised editions are still found on parents' bookshelves. Of course, childcare has changed a lot since the 1940s, and books by Dr. Spock and other experts must be regularly updated. But if you haven't picked up one of these books lately, you may not know what doctors now say about practices that once were common. Treating a fever with an ice bath? Not a good idea. Spiking baby's bottle with rice cereal? Forget about it. Putting baby to sleep on her stomach? Nope, flip her over.

"It doesn't mean today's grandparents were bad parents," says Dr. Katherine Ebsworth-Mojica, a pediatric infectious

disease specialist at Memorial Hospital and Orange Park Medical Center in Jacksonville, Florida. "They were doing the best they could with the information they had and traditions they were taught."

With more grandparents helping out with day-to-day childcare, everyone needs to be on board with the latest, pediatrician-approved advice for raising healthy kids.

Getting Off to the Healthiest Start

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends babies receive only breast milk for the first six months of life, if possible. This can protect against certain illnesses by passing maternal antibodies to newborns; breastfeeding also strengthens the bond between mother and child. In the 1970s, less than 10 percent of mothers were breastfeeding at the six-month mark; today, half of mothers are still breastfeeding at six months. It's an improvement, but new moms need more education and support.

» GRANDPARENTS' TIP

If the mother of your grandchild is able to breastfeed, encourage her to try it and keep at it, even if it's not something you did.

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Pediatricians also promote the catchphrase "back to sleep, tummy to play" to remind caregivers that infants should sleep on their backs to lower the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) or suffocation. That's a 180-degree difference from what parents were told a generation ago.

Preventing Childhood Obesity

Compared to the 1970s, today's kids weigh more, move less and typically have multiple TVs or other screens in their homes. All of this contributes to childhood obesity, which can lead to health problems later in life, like high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol and depression.

To combat childhood obesity, pediatricians recommend that kids eat a diet of mostly fruits, vegetables, lean protein, low-fat dairy and whole grains. Keep processed and fast foods to a minimum, and limit sweet beverages, including 100 percent fruit juice, which lacks fiber and is loaded with sugar—even if it's the natural kind. Portion control applies to kids, too, even the picky eaters. If Junior will eat only macaroni and cheese and chicken nuggets, keep portions to a single serving (and shop around for the healthiest versions).

"In my experience, grandparents can be prone to over-feeding for comfort, especially if they grew up in difficult times," says Dr. Ebsworth-Mojica. "They want their grandchildren to be plump, but that's not a sign of health anymore."



» GRANDPARENTS' TIP

Invite grandchildren to help you cook. Check Pinterest or kid-friendly cookbooks for fun and healthy snacks to make together.

Shaun Lampron, chief nursing officer at Twin Cities Hospital in Niceville, Florida, is the primary caregiver to two of her three grandchildren, and she makes it a priority

» GRANDPARENTS' TIP

Turn exercise into quality time with activities you and your grandchild both enjoy, like swimming, bike riding or having a nature scavenger hunt at the park.

to teach them healthy eating habits. The kids help make their own sack lunches for school—usually a PB&J sandwich for Elliot, 8, and a salad for Chloe, 11. For dinner, she fills everyone's plate with a protein, a vegetable and a small serving of carbs. They usually eat fruit for dessert, allowing sugary treats just two or three times a week.

"We're lucky because they're good eaters," she says. "But with childhood obesity such a problem in this country, it's important to pay close attention to what they eat because bad habits start in childhood."

To ward off obesity, experts recommend children do 60 minutes of physical activity each day. This can be challenging given all the indoor entertainment options. Lampron and her husband try to join their grandkids in outside play.

"When my kids were young, we were at the park playing with them for hours," she says. "As a grandparent, I just don't have that stamina. We're in pretty good shape, but there's still a limit to what we can do."

Mental Health Matters

Parents and doctors agree: Children's mental health is as important to overall well-being as physical health. That's why pediatricians ask about mental health during patient visits. The AAP estimates that about 1 in 5 American children and teens may have a mental disorder, but fewer than one-fifth receive treatment.

What mental health issues do doctors screen for? These are the most common:

Anxiety and depression: Smartphones and social media have

opened a world of trouble for older kids, giving bullies unfettered access to their targets and exposing young minds to unhealthy expectations of how they should look and act. These technologies may lead to anxiety, depression, self-loathing and even suicide among kids and teens. A variety of behavioral and drug therapies can help kids overcome these mood disorders, but getting diagnosed is vital.

Attention deficit disorders (ADD or ADHD): Children who display high levels of inattention, hyperactivity or impulsivity may be

diagnosed with ADD or ADHD. The disorder affects about three times more boys than girls, and those who struggle with ADD usually have trouble in school. Behavioral interventions or drug therapy may be helpful.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD): Autism is much more common in boys than girls and is characterized by difficulties with communication, socialization and repetitive behaviors. There are many types of autism, and some people with the disorder have unique strengths and skills, such as musical or artistic talent. Early diagnosis and interventions may improve outcomes for those with ASD, but there's no cure.

Encouraging Healthy Media Habits

One way Lampron ensures her grandchildren get enough exercise is by limiting their use of devices like computers, phones, TVs and video games. The AAP recommends no screen time for kids under 18 months and encourages only high-quality programming and apps for kids between 18 and 24 months. For kids ages 2–5, the AAP suggests limiting screen use to no more than an hour a day. For children 6 and older, consistent limits should be placed on media use, and families should have media-free time together.

» GRANDPARENTS' TIP

Ask older grandkids to use devices like computers and phones only in areas where you can monitor them. Stock a kid's closet with fun non-electronic items like books, art supplies, board games, a jump rope, various balls, a frisbee and games like cornhole (a beanbag-tossing competition).

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Excessive screen time has been linked to childhood obesity as well as delayed development. With older kids, too much unmonitored screen time can impact sleep and expose them to inappropriate content, as Lampron realized after her 11-year-old granddaughter got her own phone.

"I see the pros and cons of her having a phone," she says. "If she's at a dance and is ready to come home, she can call me. But I also have to make sure she's not looking at anything inappropriate. I'm not a real tech-savvy person, so there was definitely a learning curve to navigate that without compromising trust."

Understanding the Power of Vaccines: Old and New

Vaccines are one of the most successful prevention strategies in modern medicine, reducing or even eradicating many serious infectious diseases. In the past 40 years, new vaccines have been introduced to protect against illnesses like hepatitis A, chickenpox, *Haemophilus influenzae* type B (Hib), meningitis and rotavirus. Vaccines for hepatitis B and HPV can even prevent cancer. Unfortunately, a lot of false information about vaccine safety has been perpetuated. Dr. Ebsworth-Mojica routinely has to remind parents about the benefits of vaccinations. Lack of public knowledge and some strong opposition to vaccines have led to a decrease in children receiving routine shots.

"Because of vaccines, we have eradicated smallpox, and we have been able to keep many other childhood illnesses at bay," she says. "I believe every parent has the right to choose

Beware the Button Battery

Dr. Andrew Bozeman, a pediatric surgeon at Fairview Park Hospital in Dublin, Georgia, has seen his fair share of foreign objects lodged in a child's esophagus—dimes, pennies, small toys and even erasers.



But nothing concerns him more than the button battery, commonly found in thermometers, hearing aids, key fobs, digital watches and bathroom scales.

"Swallowing a button battery can cause a chemical burn on the inside of the esophagus and form a fistula between the esophagus and the trachea," he says. "It takes a very invasive procedure to fix that. And if it's not fixed, things that should stay in the esophagus, like food and drink and saliva, can end up in the lungs."

Button batteries also can cause burns if a child puts one in his ear or nose. So always store spare button batteries and devices that use them out of reach of children. If children have toys with button batteries, always monitor playtime to ensure safety.

for their children, but they should do so equipped with adequate information. Parents should not base their decision on misinformation from sources who fudged clinical results to their convenience."

She is referring, of course, to a discredited study from 1998 that linked the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine to autism. Despite repeated, reputable studies that

» GRANDPARENTS' TIP

Be wary of health tips and "news" you see in online ads or social media. If you have questions about children's health, ask your doctor to recommend reputable books, websites and other resources.

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have debunked the theory, doubts still linger. And it's largely Dr. Google's fault, she says.

The deluge of health information available online can be overwhelming, and it can be hard to tell fact from fiction. That's why Dr. Ebsworth-Mojica directs her patients' caregivers to only the most credible sources of information, which include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov) and the American Academy of Pediatrics' HealthyChildren.org. ■