US FAMILY HEALTH PLAN

Children's Wellness Toolkit

This guide helps families understand the importance of well-child visits and provides information about a child's growth and development from infancy through the teen years.

The toolkit includes helpful information on healthy growth and development, nutrition, sleep habits, obesity prevention, mental health, and recommended vaccinations. It also provides practical tips for military families on how to keep track of and organize your child's health records.



WELL-CHILD VISITS:
A Foundation for Healthy Development

The Benefits of well-child visits:

Routine well-child visits help keep your child healthy as they grow. Regular checkups can help make sure children are developing well through the many changes that happen during childhood. These visits give parents a chance to ask questions, discuss concerns, and learn ways to support their child's health.

- **Tracking Growth and Development:** Well-child visits help track your child's growth and development. They also give you a chance to talk about learning, behavior, social skills, and other important parts of development.
- **Important Conversations:** These visits are a good time to talk to your child's healthcare provider about any concerns related to development, behavior, sleep, nutrition, or social interactions.
- **Partnering with Your Child's Healthcare Provider:** Regular visits help build a strong partnership between parents and healthcare providers. Working together can help ensure your child develops healthy habits and reaches their full potential.
- **Prevention:** During well-child visits, your child may receive recommended vaccinations to help prevent disease. You can also learn about current health recommendations and ways to support your child's overall well-being.
- **Variety of Topics:** Well-child visits cover many important topics, including physical health, nutrition, sleep, growth and development, immunizations, and emotional well-being. For teenagers, visits may also include discussions about mental health, alcohol and substance use, and other behaviors that can affect their health and safety.

Well-Child Visit Schedule (AAP, 2025)

Review this schedule of screenings and assessments from infancy through adolescence (0-18).

INFANCY (Birth–12 Months)	TODDLER / EARLY CHILDHOOD (15 Months–4 Years)	SCHOOL AGE & ADOLESCENCE (5–21 Years)
3–5 days old	15 months	Annual visits ages 5–21
1 month	18 months	
2 months	24 months (2 years)	
4 months	30 months (2½ years)	
6 months	3 years	
9 months	4 years	
12 months		

(AACAP, 2025)

TIP for Parents

Mark these on your calendar and schedule the next visit before you leave the office. Bring a list of questions or concerns, track milestones at home, and don't hesitate to reach out between visits if something comes up.



SLEEP HEALTH

Well-child visits are a good time to talk about healthy sleep habits. Sleep is important for your child's growth and development. It supports physical growth, brain development, and immune system health. It also supports emotional well-being, attention, learning, and overall health.



Recommended Sleep Amounts (per 24 hours):

- ✓ **Newborns (0–3 months):** 14–17 hours (including naps)
- ✓ **Infants (4–12 months):** 12–16 hours (including naps)
- ✓ **Toddlers (1–2 years):** 11–14 hours (including naps)
- ✓ **Preschoolers (3–5 years):** 10–13 hours (including naps)
- ✓ **School-aged Kids (6–12 years):** 9–12 hours
- ✓ **Teenagers (13–18 years):** 8–10 hours

(Clinic, 2024)

Reality check for families:

Many children and teens are not getting enough sleep! About **35% of children ages 4 months to 14 years** do not sleep enough. Among high school students (ages 13–18), about **77%** do not get the recommended amount.

Not getting enough sleep can affect mood, behavior, school performance, sports performance, concentration, and safety. Common reasons for not getting enough sleep include early school start times, too much screen use, busy schedules, and inconsistent bedtimes. (CDC, cdc.gov, 2024)

TIPS for Healthy Sleep Habits

- ✓ Keep the same bedtime and wake-up times, even on weekends.
- ✓ Create a calm, dark, screen-free bedtime routine.
- ✓ Limit screen use, especially before bedtime.
- ✓ Make sure your child's sleep environment is comfortable and quiet.
- ✓ Talk with your child's pediatrician if they snore, have trouble falling asleep, or wake up often during the night.

NUTRITION GUIDANCE



At well-child visits, your pediatrician will review your child's growth, weight, and body mass index (BMI). They can provide personalized advice and address any concerns.

Good nutrition is important for your child's growth and development. A well-balanced diet supports healthy weight, strong bones, brain function, energy levels, immune health, and mental health.

In early 2026, the **U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2025–2030** introduced a new, updated food pyramid. The new food pyramid emphasizes **eating real, whole, nutrient-dense foods.** It also recommends avoiding highly processed foods, added sugar, and refined carbohydrates.



Key changes in the 2026 guidelines and new pyramid:

- ✓ **Greater emphasis on high-quality proteins (including animal-based) and healthy fats.**
- ✓ **Strong focus on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.**
- ✓ **Clear priority on "real food."**
- ✓ **Avoid added sugars, refined grains, and highly processed items (such as chips, cookies, sodas, and candy).**

Specific recommendations according to the USDA:

- ✓ **Focus on WHOLE, MINIMALLY PROCESSED foods.**
- ✓ **Eat protein at every meal; include things like eggs, chicken, meat, seafood, and red meat. Vegetarians may choose eggs, dairy, beans, lentils, nuts, and seeds.**
- ✓ **Eat healthy fats from meats, eggs, full fat dairy, seafood, olives and avocados.**
- ✓ **Fats for cooking include olive oil, butter, and tallow.**
- ✓ **Fill half your child's plate with fruits and vegetables every day, aiming for a colorful variety.**
- ✓ **Stay away from white bread, breakfast cereals, crackers, and flour tortillas. Switch to whole grains (oatmeal, whole-wheat bread, brown rice, etc.).**
- ✓ **AVOID soda, sports drinks, and juice; choose water or milk instead.**

Bring questions about mealtime challenges, snacks, family meals, or the new guidelines to your child's next well visit.

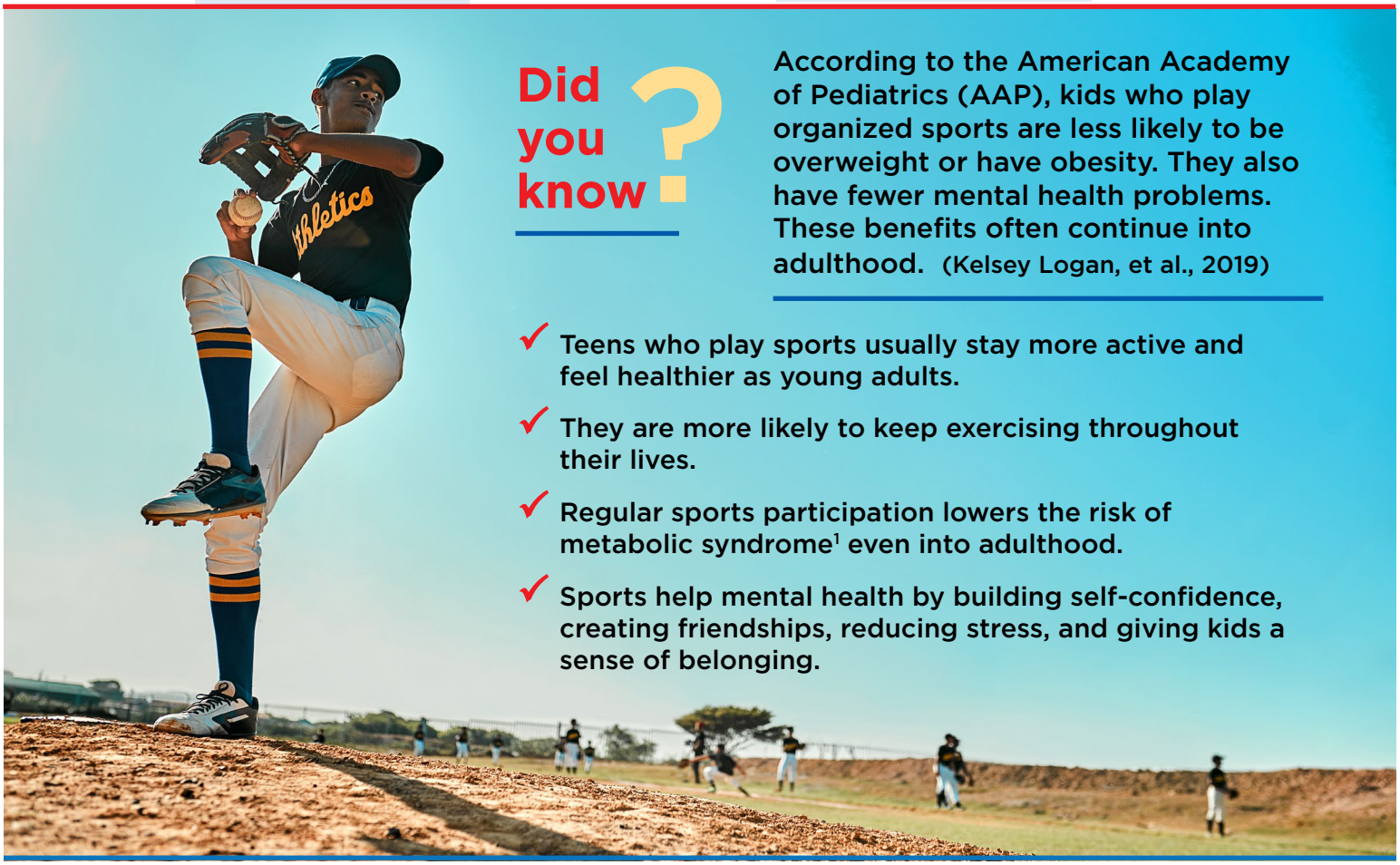
For the latest details, visit RealFood.gov or HealthyChildren.org.

CHILDHOOD OBESITY

A serious problem related to Nutrition is the issue of **Childhood Obesity**. 1 in 5 children and teens (ages 2-19) have obesity in the United States. Some factors driving the problem include **unhealthy eating patterns, lack of physical activity, and insufficient sleep along with excessive screen time**. (CDC, www.cdc.gov, 2026)

Here are some solutions for parents:

Problem	Root Causes	Solutions	Key Actions	Benefits
Unhealthy Eating Patterns	Too much sugar and processed foods (like chips, soda, and fast food)	Follow the latest USDA food pyramid recommendations	Family meals together. Choose whole foods. Avoid processed foods and sugary drinks	Improves nutrition quality, builds lifelong habits
Lack of Physical Activity	Sitting too much, limited playtime, screen heavy routines	Build daily movement habits and join sports early	Enroll in sports (soccer, swimming, dance, martial arts) by age 5-8. Aim for 60+ minutes of moderate to vigorous activity daily.	Burns calories, builds muscle, improves metabolism, boosts mental health
Insufficient Sleep & Excessive Screen Time	Staying up late, blue light from phones/TV, no bedtime routines, and device access in bedroom	Create a consistent sleep schedule and limit screen time.	Age-appropriate sleep schedule. Device-free bedrooms. Follow the same routine every night	Helps balance hormones, reduces cravings, and improves emotional regulation.



Did you know?

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), kids who play organized sports are less likely to be overweight or have obesity. They also have fewer mental health problems. These benefits often continue into adulthood. (Kelsey Logan, et al., 2019)

- ✓ **Teens who play sports usually stay more active and feel healthier as young adults.**
- ✓ **They are more likely to keep exercising throughout their lives.**
- ✓ **Regular sports participation lowers the risk of metabolic syndrome[1] even into adulthood.**
- ✓ **Sports help mental health by building self-confidence, creating friendships, reducing stress, and giving kids a sense of belonging.**

[1] *Excess belly fat, high blood pressure, high blood sugar, high triglycerides and low good cholesterol. Together these greatly increase risk of heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes.*

SCREEN TIME

Screen time is the amount of time a child spends using devices with screens, such as phones, tablets, computers, and TVs. Healthy screen habits are important for a child's growth and well-being. Too much screen time can affect sleep, school performance, physical activity, mood, and self-esteem. A healthy balance of screen use can support a child's physical, mental, and emotional health.



Screen Time Guidelines (AACAP, 2025):

- ✓ **Birth–18 months:** Avoid screens except for video chatting.
- ✓ **18–24 months:** Use educational programming with a caregiver.
- ✓ **Ages 2–5 years:** Limit non-educational screen time to about 1 hour on weekdays and 3 hours on weekends.
- ✓ **Ages 6+ years:** Set consistent limits and encourage healthy habits.

Good nutrition and healthy habits developed during childhood can have lifelong benefits. Children who eat balanced, nutritious foods, stay physically active, and limit screen time are more likely to reach their full learning potential, maintain a healthy weight, and reduce their risk of developing obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and other health problems later in life. These healthy habits can also support better mental health and academic success.

Healthy Family Habits

- ✓ **Turn off screens during meals and before bedtime.**
- ✓ **Monitor content and utilize parental controls on devices.**
- ✓ **Encourage outdoor play, sports, reading books, hobbies, and family activities.**
- ✓ **Talk to your kids about online safety and model healthy screen use.**

MENTAL HEALTH

Well-child visits are a good time to talk about a child's mental health. Mental health is an important part of a child's overall health and well-being. Many mental health conditions begin during childhood or the teen years. In 2023, about 5.3 million adolescents ages 12–17 in the United States had a diagnosed mental or behavioral health condition. Anxiety was the most common condition (16.1%), followed by depression (8.4%) and behavior or conduct problems (6.3%) (Sappenfield, 2023). Finding these conditions early and providing treatment can lead to better outcomes. Early detection and treatment can improve outcomes, support a child's development, relationships, and overall well-being.

WARNING SIGNS

- ❒ **Frequent tantrums or irritability**
- ❒ **Excessive fear or worry**
- ❒ **Declining school performance**
- ❒ **Loss of interest in activities they usually enjoy**
- ❒ **Feeling tired often or having changes in sleep habits**
- ❒ **Avoiding friends, family, or social activities**
- ❒ **Self-harm or risky behavior**
- ❒ **Using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs**

Behaviors that can support Mental Health

- ✓ **Regular physical activity**
- ✓ **A healthy diet**
- ✓ **Adequate sleep**
- ✓ **Building strong family and social relationships**

If you notice any of these signs, make an appointment with your child's Primary Care Provider.

NOTE — IF YOUR CHILD MAY BE FEELING SUICIDAL

Take all talk of suicide or self-harm seriously. Warning signs may include talking about wanting to die, feelings of hopelessness, giving away belongings, withdrawing from others, or sudden severe mood changes. Do not leave your child alone if they are in immediate danger.

- ✓ **Call or text 988** to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
- ✓ **Call 911** or **go to the nearest emergency department** if there is an immediate risk

IMMUNIZATION GUIDANCE

Well-child visits are the perfect time to review and schedule your child's immunizations to keep them up to date.



2026 Vaccine Recommendations: AAP vs. CDC

In 2026, there are some differences between the two leading sources of guidance:

- **American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP):** Continues to recommend routine immunization to protect against 18 diseases.
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):** Updated its schedule in 2026, reducing the number of routine vaccines. Core vaccines remain routinely recommended, but several others have been moved to "high-risk groups only" or "shared clinical decision-making."

Side-by-Side Comparison

Vaccine / Protection	*AAP Recommendation*	*CDC Recommendation (2026)*
Hepatitis A & B	Routine for all	High-risk or shared decision-making
Rotavirus	Routine for all	Shared clinical decision-making
Influenza (flu)	Routine annual	Shared clinical decision-making
RSV (infants)	Routine prevention for infants	High-risk groups
Meningococcal (MenACWY)	Routine	High-risk or shared decision-making
Core vaccines (MMR, DTaP, Polio, etc.)	Routine for all	Routine for all

NOTE: *The AAP and CDC agree on the vaccines that are considered most important for children. The main differences are in a few additional vaccines that may offer broader protection against certain illnesses.*

For the latest schedules:

- **AAP:** HealthyChildren.org
- **CDC:** cdc.gov/vaccines

Parental Choice and Shared Decision-Making

You know your child best. The well-child visit is an opportunity to discuss vaccine questions, concerns, your child's health history, family preferences, and any individual risk factors with your pediatrician. Many parents choose to follow the fuller AAP schedule, while others prefer a more selective approach aligned with the CDC.

TIP for Parents

Write down questions beforehand and bring them to the visit. Your pediatrician can provide personalized recommendations, review each vaccine, and help create a plan that fits your child's needs.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR MILITARY FAMILIES: Maintaining Continuity During PCS Moves

Practical Tips for PCS Transitions

- ✓ **Schedule Ahead:** Complete well-child visits, physicals, and any needed immunizations ***before*** your PCS. Aim to get the next visit scheduled and documented prior to departure.
- ✓ **Request Records Early:** Request copies of your child's medical and dental records at least **1 month before your PCS**. Hand-carry physical copies (or digital on a secure USB/ thumb drive) to your new location. This is especially critical for overseas moves.
- ✓ **If your provider uses an online patient portal:** Create your login ahead of time and download copies of important records to keep for your files.
- ✓ **Overseas and Non-Electronic Records:** Care received overseas or at civilian providers may not be in electronic systems. Request physical **copies of your medical records** from those providers before leaving the duty station.

Immunization-Specific Strategies:

- ✓ Bring the physical immunization record to **every** well-child visit.
- ✓ Ask providers to document vaccines clearly (date, type, lot number, provider).

At the New Duty Station:

- ✓ Provide hand-carried records to your new provider.
- ✓ Schedule an initial well-child or transition visit soon after arrival.



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Children's Wellness Toolkit

An educational guide to understanding important topics related to children's health.

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