ELEVATE MEDICAL

elevatemedical.com.au

Helpful Tips from a General Practitioner and a Mum

Dr Joan San
MBBS FRACGP DRANZCOG

Find a quality General Practice

I think it is essential that all families have a good GP whom they can trust. In the first few years after having children, you will probably see your family doctor more often than at any stage in your life. It is worth remembering that children are not little adults, as medically they are quite unique. You need to find a GP who has experience in dealing with little people. I have found the local maternal child health nurse or the local play ground or school yard to be a good starting place to ask other parents for their recommendations.

A Home Medical Kit

I think all homes need to have a few basic things when you have young children. I always say it's worth spending the money on a good quality ear thermometer. It will inevitably be 2 o'clock in the morning when your kid is sick, unhappy and restless and you are trying to take their temperature. An accurate reading will help you decide what to do next.

Consider some pain relief and temperature relief - eg paracetamol (I like the Dymadon brand as it tastes better) and/or ibuprofen (Nurofen). Never go on holiday without these but make sure you follow the dosage schedules very carefully.

Remember a Ventolin puffer and a Spacer if your child has asthma. Consider a non-drowsy antihistamine (eg Zyrtec/Claratyne) if they have certain allergies or react to bites.
A basic First Aid kit for cuts and sprains containing an antiseptic (eg Betadine), band aids and a stretch bandage/sports tape can be handy.

When to Seek Medical Help

I often get asked, "When should I take my child to see a doctor?" Well the easy answer is, whenever you are concerned. There are a couple of simple guidelines though.

A) Age group - the age of your child is a big factor when wondering if you should seek medical help. Medically speaking we generally divide kids into neonates (under 3 months old), young children (3 months to 3 years old) and older children (over 3 years old).

Neonates do not have a fully developed immune system. Breast feeding (if you can) helps by transferring your antibodies through the breast milk, although this alone is not enough. Generally speaking a baby under 3 months old should always seek medical attention if unwell, and especially if they are under 4 weeks old. This can include being off their feeds, being more sleepy or irritable and especially if they have rash or a fever over 38 degrees Celsius.

It is worth remembering that the young child cannot express themselves as well. Although they can fight infections better than a neonate, they will generally need to be taken to the doctor so that we can determine the cause of their discomfort.

The older child can generally tell us when and where it hurts.

B) Viral infection - the most common illness you will see your family doctor for is regarding various viral infections. I generally say you need to take your child to the doctor if their temperature is over 38 degrees Celsius for a day or two or if their fever does not come down much after paracetamol or ibuprofen. If they have a cough or are complaining of a sore ear, you may wish to take your child to the doctor to check their chest or ear. It should be noted that this general information is for otherwise well children. If your child has any other medical problems or is prone to an illness (eg ear infections) then you will generally need to seek medical attention sooner. In general a sick child is usually lethargic and not eating or drinking well.

C) Gastroenteritis is also a common illness in young children. The age group rule also applies here; since younger children get dehydrated more quickly they need to seek medical attention sooner. Hydrolyte icy poles are a great tool as they are well tolerated; hydrate children easily and also prevent dehydration. Generally with gastro you will need to see your family doctor to assess whether your child is getting dehydrated, especially if you have returned from an overseas trip.

Trust your Gut

In children things can change quickly. Although children may get better very quickly and bounce back, they can also get sick pretty quickly. If you feel they are not improving or are getting worse, you need to take them back to the doctor. I always tell my patients the worse thing to do is wake at 2 am thinking that you should have taken them to the doctor. Always get them checked again if you think they are not right. The mother or carer really does know best (a lot of the time) and we value your story because we know you regularly observe your child.

Nurse-on-call or your local emergency / paediatric emergency department are good resources in the middle of the night if you are concerned.