

The Growing Years

Healthy Start...where good results begin

3 Years 4 Months

Your Child Wants You To Know

How I Move:

- I can throw and kick a ball.
- I draw circles and squares.
- I am beginning to copy capital letters.
- I can dress and undress myself.

How I Think:

- I can identify "same" and "different" objects.
- I talk in short sentences.
- I can tell and remember parts of a story.

How I Get Along:

- I enjoy being with other children.
- I engage in fantasy play.
- I understand that there are ways to solve problems. I still need lots of practice with this.

The Runabout Years

Three year olds are sometimes called "runabouts". You can see from watching preschoolers' activity why this name is right on target. Running, jumping, rolling, dancing and any other motion is fun for a 3 year old. It feels good to be able to move so easily after those trying months of stumbling. You may notice some clumsiness and bumping into things. This is just because preschoolers are so excited about all the things they want to do that they rush, rush, and rush.

Physical Changes: Height and Weight

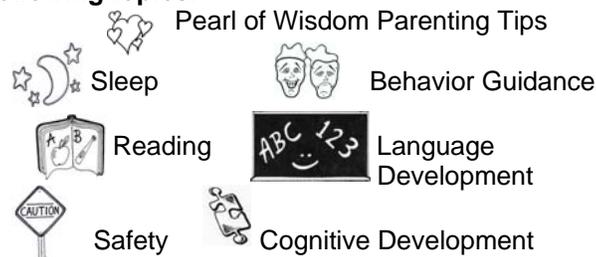
The growth rate during the ages 3, 4, and 5 is slower and steadier than it was during the first three years of a child's life. According to the Children's Medical Hospital in Boston, the average weight and height of preschoolers is:

	Height (inches)	
Age	Girl	Boy
3	37 ³ / ₄	38
4	40 ¹ / ₂	40 ³ / ₄
5	43	43 ¹ / ₄
6	45 ¹ / ₂	46 ¹ / ₄
	Weight (pounds)	
Age	Girl	Boy
3	31 ³ / ₄	32 ¹ / ₄
4	36 ¹ / ₄	36 ¹ / ₂
5	41	41 ¹ / ₂
6	46 ¹ / ₂	48 ¹ / ₄

These are averages, however, and many factors, such as diet, exercise, illness, emotions, and the height and physical build of the child's parents, influence a child's height and weight.

Growth occurs mostly in a preschooler's legs and the trunk of her body. Her stomach flattens and thus her physical proportions begin to resemble those of a child or adult rather than those of a baby.

Watch for these symbols to find articles on the following topics:



Motor Skills

The 3-year-old child loves physical activity, and an increasing skill in motor activities will make the child feel confident about attempting new challenges. Large muscle skills are developed first, but at the end of the early childhood years, children are starting to use their small muscles more frequently.



They run, jump, climb, and ride tricycles. They use crayons, pencils, felt markers, and scissors.

Most parents and caregivers are very concerned that children are developing the motor skills typical of their ages. Remember that a child may not be able to perform all the skills listed. Variations in children's abilities are due to many things. They include how mature a child is physically, how much she enjoys physical activity, the number of opportunities she has to practice various motor skills and her overall health.

Fitness for Your Preschooler

You may not think of "fitness" in terms of young children, but in the first few years of life, you can start laying the groundwork for your child to lead an active lifestyle down the road.

Young children are learning to master basic movements like walking, running, kicking, and throwing. Kids are naturally active, so give your child lots of opportunities to practice and build on these skills. By encouraging your child to engage in active play, you are helping your child to be physically fit now and in the future.

How much is enough? Even at this young age there are activity guidelines. According to the National Association of Sports and Physical Education, everyday young children should

- Get at least 30 minutes of structured physical activity (adult led)
- Get at least 60 minutes of unstructured physical activity (free play)
- Not be inactive for more than one hour at a time (except for sleeping)

When you are thinking of getting your child active, it is important to understand what your child can do and what skills are appropriate for

this age. By age 3, most children can run and jump well. In addition, your child will learn to balance briefly on one foot, climb well, kick the ball forward, throw the ball overhand, and pedal a tricycle.

Keep these skills in mind when trying to encourage your child to be active. Play games and provide age-appropriate active toys, such as balls and riding toys.

Walking, playing, and exploring your backyard or using playground equipment at a local park can be fun for the entire family.

There are also many games that you can play with your child that will provide opportunities for fun and fitness for you and your child.

- Walk like a penguin, hop like a frog, or imitate other animals' movements.
- Sit facing each other and hold hands. Rock back and forth and sing the song "Row, row, row your boat."
- Bend at the waist and touch the ground. Walk your hands forward and inch along like a caterpillar.
- Sit on the ground and let your child step over your legs, or make a bridge with your body and let your child crawl under.
- Play follow the leader, "ring around the rosy" and other similar games.
- Listen to music and dance together.



The possibilities are endless- try to come up with your own active ideas, or follow your child's lead. Also, limit the amount of time your child spends watching TV (including DVD's and videos) and using the computer.

Kids who are active at a young age tend to stay active throughout their lives. And staying fit can improve self-esteem, help maintain a healthy weight, and decrease the risk of serious illnesses, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease.



Language Development

Along with better physical coordination comes better language.

Preschoolers learn new words every day. Their sentences are getting longer, too. Their speech is easier to understand, even to people outside the family.



By the end of the fourth year, children have developed most of the basic speech that adults use. Preschoolers can understand and use almost 1,000 words. They also use correct grammar, including prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, plurals, and pronouns. You can hear these differences by listening to your child talk. Instead of saying "me go bathroom," you will soon hear "I have to go to the bathroom." Instead of pointing and saying "Doggie," you will hear "Look at the dog."

From 36 to 60 months, the preschooler talks with many people – family members, playmates, caregivers, teachers, and other adults. Talking with all these people is good practice. The purpose of speech is communication. The more your child talks and listens to others, the more words and expressions he will learn and use. You may also hear your preschooler using words or slang that he has picked up from playmates. This is natural.

Many children at this age seem to stutter. This is because they think words faster than they can say them. This sounds like stuttering. Don't worry. Be sure to give your child plenty of time to speak. Listen patiently and look at him. Encourage speech so he is not afraid to talk. If some words are pronounced wrong, include the right pronunciation in your answer.

For example:

Child: Can I have a bebana?

You: Yes, I will get a banana for you.

This kind of response gives children confidence and a desire to try the word.

Common Childhood Fears

Fear is a normal emotion and nearly everyone, regardless of age, has fears. But parents, and

caregivers often feel that toddlers and preschoolers have many fears! What are some common fears of young children?

Fear of separation. Most toddlers and preschoolers experience many separations from their parents. Baby-sitters come to care for them, and they frequently begin child care or nursery school at this age. A young child worries about being abandoned and about facing new and strange people. Staying with a child for a day or more in child care or nursery school frequently helps him get used to new adults, children, toys, and the room. He will feel more secure and "let you go" with few tears. Whether in your own home or in another situation, always tell your child that you are leaving. "Sneaking out" only increases his distrust and fear.

Fear of baths: Many young children worry about going down the drain with the water. No amount of logical talk will change this fear. Allow your children to play in water – in a pan, a sink and lastly, learning over the edge of the tub. Gradually, the fear will subside.

Fear of dogs: Dogs are often loud, fast moving, and unpredictable. No wonder so many children are afraid of them. Look at pictures of dogs and talk about them with your child. Watch one from across the street, and finally, pick a gentle dog for your child to approach.

Fear of loud noises: Loud noises from vacuum cleaners, hair dryers, saws, fire engines, and ambulances may be very frightening. Try letting your child look at and touch appliances in your home before you turn them on. Visit the fire station and let him look at and, perhaps, sit in the fire truck.

Fear of change: Your child probably likes his world best when things go along as usual. He probably enjoys hearing the same story and eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches every day for lunch. When things change (dinner is served at a different time, Mother or Dad don't come home from work at the usual time, someone starts to cry or Mother and Dad argue), the young child becomes frightened. If



there is a family move, a divorce, a separation, or a death in the family, your child needs special help. When crises occur, child development experts encourage parents and caregivers to keep daily routines the same. They need to talk to their child ahead of time if a change (a divorce, a new baby, a stay in the hospital) is going to take place and to tell the child how they feel about the situation. ("I'm upset because Daddy and I fight a lot, but I'm not mad at you.")

Fear of the dark: Children are often frightened in the dark. It is definitely "OK" to keep lights on in a child's room. With time, you may be able to gradually reduce the amount of light. Some children decide on their own to turn lights off.

Several characteristics of children's thinking influence children's fears: they confuse fantasy and dreams with reality; they often think that objects are "alive;" they have difficulty understanding the size of different objects; they don't fully understand cause-and-effect relationships; and they feel small, helpless, and unable to control what is happening to them.

When children are frightened, they need hugs, reassurance and someone to talk to them about the frightening experience. Never laugh or make fun of your child's fears and don't get angry at him. Avoid obviously frightening television programs or movies. Never threaten a child with the boogey man or spooky stories. Carefully see that older children or adults do not scare your child for their own amusement.

Play acting, drawing, or using dolls, puppets or stories are ways to encourage your child to describe a frightening experience. Sometimes older preschoolers can learn to tell a frightening monster, "Go away, I don't like you and I don't want you to come back." Such expressions may help a child feel more in control of his life. All fears cannot be prevented. In fact, some fears are a part of growing up and learning new things. For example, your child needs to know that the loud scream of the fire engine means "Danger, get out of the way!" There are healthy fears and unhealthy fears. Help your child to understand the difference between the two.

Dealing with Difficult Changes

The events that trigger change can be positive or negative. As adults, parents can see changes as an unavoidable part of life. Changes occur in many forms for families: someone dies or is born, someone gets a new job or loses, a job single parent marries and moves the family or adds new members to the home, a married couple divorces and moves, or someone may be hospitalized. All of these events bring about change in the life of a young child.

Moving: Three and four year olds count on parents to provide stability in their lives. Five and six year olds tend to have a difficult time packing up and moving because they may be getting used to a school environment and friends. When a child moves, he suffers the loss of his home; friends, teachers, and child care providers, as well as other families' adults and surroundings.

New baby: When a new baby arrives, a child may lose being the center of her parents' attention, her baby furniture and clothing, and time alone with grandparents or other respected adults. Older children are typically expected to give up old toys for their younger siblings. Many parents expect 3 and 4 year olds to lose their baby ways the day the newborn enters the house.

Separation/Divorce: When parents separate or divorce, children may lose a parent, a playmate, security, and a lifestyle. A remaining parent may provide the physical needs of the children but be emotionally unavailable.

Death: Death of a grandparent, parent or sibling can cause minor to major changes as the family reacts to the loss.

Adjustments: Starting school, changing child care providers and losing playmates are changes children will all go through. The important thing is not to try to avoid change, but rather to help children develop skills in problem solving, communication, and social interaction to flow with life's changes.

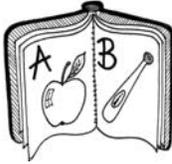


Children's Responses to Change

Children may become clingy, whiny, withdrawn, aggressive, sulky, depressed, overactive, jumpy, or frustrated more easily in response to change. Children may also cry or regress in bed wetting or baby talk. Stress can affect children's emotional illness, headaches or stomachaches.

How Can Caregivers Help?

Share with books: Reading a children's book written on the topic you are dealing with is one way to talk about the situation. Children can see how another child or animal reacted. Check your local bookstore or library for these books:



- Moving: Mr. Rogers, First Experience Book Moving, ages 3 to 7; Waber, B. Ira Says Goodbye, ages 3 to 8.
- New Baby: Keats, J. Peter's Chair, ages 3 to 6; Scott, A. On Mother's Lap, ages 2 to 6.
- Divorce: Watson, J. and Switzer, R. Sometimes a Family Has to Split Up, ages 2 to 5; Girard, L. At Daddy's On Saturdays, ages 4 to 8.
- Death: Wilhelm, H. I'll Always Love You, ages 3 to 6; DePaola, T. Nana Upstairs and Nana Downstairs, ages 3 to 8.

Allow Time for Adjustment: Allow plenty of time for children to adjust to changes and stressful events. Children view the world and all of its people and belongings as a place that exists only for them and their happiness. When life changes too quickly, children become frustrated. Dealing with children's anger is more time consuming than preparing for the change beforehand, when everyone has a healthier attitude.

Focus on Positive Choices: Let children choose between two positive choices so that they have a sense of control. When time is short and emotions are strong, choices don't come easily, but children generally comply faster when given a choice. For example, you might ask, "Do you want to hop like a bunny or scamper like a squirrel to the car?" When children refuse, the parent can offer further

suggestions, such as "Would you like to walk or shall I carry you?" If children still do not choose after a reasonable amount of time, the parent can calmly and respectfully choose for them.

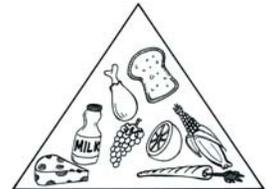
Explain: Answer children's questions. Children need to hear many, many times where Grandpa went when he died. Explain in simple terms what has happened and what will happen next.

Provide Consistency: Reassure children. Let children know what the plans are and stick to them as best you can. This is the time to keep routines in place as much as possible, even when all else is chaotic. Sleeping, eating, and cuddling are important through stressful times.

Offer Security: Rules and limits also need to remain constant to make children feel secure. Most importantly, repeatedly let children know that they are not at fault. Show children extra love and attention during this time to help them through the rough spots.

Nutrition for the 3 Year Old

One big job for parents and caregivers is to choose healthy food for children.



With so many products on the market, it is hard to know what children really need. All people need the same types of food to provide the nutrients to grow and stay healthy. The difference between adults and children is the amount of each nutrient needed. For example, children need more milk than adults for growing bones. Adults require a larger serving size of meats or vegetables because they have larger bodies.

Here is a list of the basic types of foods we all need and some examples of these types of food:

Milk and dairy products:

Milk, yogurt, cheese, custard, pudding, milk-based soups.

Meat and meat substitutes



Chicken, pork, beef, fish, eggs, peanut butter, dried beans, peas, nuts

Fruit and vegetables

Tomatoes, peas, beans, corn, carrots, potatoes, melon, apples, peaches (include both yellow and green vegetables)

Breads and cereals:

Cooked cereals, ready-to-eat cereals, macaroni, rice, bread, muffins, rolls, (include whole-grain or enriched breads)

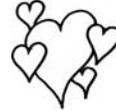
Children often want to eat certain foods all the time. This is OK as long as the food is nutritious. Children will eat what their bodies need if you make a variety of foods available. For example, a 3-year-old might eat pears, peaches, and pineapple for several weeks but not bread. Then suddenly, no more fruit, but lots of meat. Then milk and cheese will be a favorite.

Every once in a while, give your child a new food. Don't insist that he eat it, but let him know about it. Talk about the shape, texture, and color. Encourage him to taste it. If he does not like it the first time around, serve the food again in a few weeks. Children's tastes change just like adults. As they get older, children learn to like more foods. Preschoolers who do not eat a variety of foods in a balanced diet may benefit from vitamin supplements. Large doses of specific vitamins have not been shown to help healthy children, and in some cases may even be harmful.

Tips for Serving Meals:

- Variety of color adds interest to the meal.
- Children are sensitive to temperature. Avoid very hot or cold foods.
- Serve small portions on a small plate.
- Let your child judge how much to eat.
- Make foods easy to eat. If your child is still having trouble with a spoon or a fork, serve only one food that requires a utensil so your child can practice. Other foods should be finger foods. For example, carrots can be picked up with fingers, but rice or mashed potatoes cannot.
- Fill cups less than half full. This makes drinking easier and is less messy in case of spills.

- Serve meals at regular times. A hungry child is irritable, and less likely to cooperate and eat well.
- Avoid nagging about table manners. Make mealtimes enjoyable. Encourage a child who does well with a spoon, tries new foods, or wipes his face with a napkin.
- Remember that appetites change. Your child may be very hungry one day and eat only a little the next.



Pearl of Wisdom Tiny Pizzas

Ingredients:

- 1 standard-sized bagel, cut in half
- Tomato sauce
- Shredded mozzarella cheese
- Toppings like diced green pepper, chopped onion, or chopped tomato (whatever you like)
- Seasonings like oregano, basil, and pepper.

Directions:

1. Set the oven to low heat.
2. Spread tomato sauce on each bagel half.
3. Sprinkle the shredded cheese all over the tomato sauce on each half.
4. Add your favorite toppings.
5. Put a light sprinkling of seasonings on each half.
6. Put your bagel halves on a baking sheet.
7. Bake in the oven on low heat for about 5 to 8 minutes. You'll know they're done when the cheese is bubbly.
8. Let cool for a minute, then enjoy your tiny pizzas!

Involve Children in Food Preparation

Children like to be part of any activity. Letting them help in food preparation helps them develop an interest in food. It also teaches helping skills, counting skills, and cooperation. Try to allow enough time to prepare meals so that you are not rushed. Be patient and give your child a chance to help with appropriate jobs.

When you ask a child to do something, give simple directions: "I need one fork from the



drawer. Can you get it for me?" " Would you please get the margarine out of the refrigerator?"

Watch your child to see that he can handle the job. If the refrigerator door is hard to open, think of things he can get out of low cabinets instead.

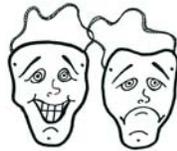
Say what you mean: "Watch me pour the flour in the bowl. Now you try it."

Here are some jobs a 3 year old can try:

- Wash vegetables
- Snap beans
- Shape burgers or meatballs
- Peel banana (if top is cut)
- Clear dishes from table
- Get out silverware
- Pour ingredients
- Open packages
- Pour juice or milk from small pitcher
- Spread peanut butter on bread or cracker
- Knead bread dough

Children and Misbehavior

There is always a reason for misbehavior. Parents can deal with it better if they understand the cause.



If children misbehave because they are tired or run down, change their schedule so they develop good health habits.

If parents expect children to behave like adults, they will be disappointed. Love children as they are – noisy, energetic, and dirty. Children who feel loved will want to act the way their parents expect them to act.

If misbehavior results from lack of confidence, try to use more encouraging and positive words and fewer "put downs".

Separate the child from the behavior. You can love the child but reject the behavior. Children love encouragement, approval, and kind words – these reinforce good behavior.

Games for Growing

Word games are lots of fun for 3 year olds and adults. But get ready to be silly.

Play rhyming games: Say "What rhymes with hat?" Take turns, thinking of words. Any sound that rhymes is OK even if it's not a real word. The idea is to practice listening to sounds and repeating similar ones. So what rhymes with hat? Bat, mat, sat, cat, blat, dat, fat, lat, nat...

Try the Name Game: Say "I'm looking at a door. What are you looking at?" Take turns looking around the house and yard naming as many things as you can.

Play telephone: Use a play telephone or just hold your hand up to your ear and call each other. Start by "ringing" the phone. Have your child answer. Talk about his toys, the weather, what he has been doing. Then say goodbye and hang up. Then have your child call you. Then say "Who else can we call?" Your child may carry on an imaginary conversation with Grandma or teddy bear without your having to say anything. Sometimes, you may have to play along and be the "other person."

Use language toys: Toys that encourage language development are fun for preschoolers. Toys with a pull string that "talk" are good. Some have nursery rhymes, the alphabet or name objects.

Read books: Visit your local library for books, magazines, story hour, and reading clubs geared for preschoolers. If you are not familiar with children's books, ask the librarian for some suggestions. Here are some preschool favorites:

Where the Wild Things Are,

Maurice Sendak

We Share Everything,

Robert Munsch

Elmer and the Lost Teddy,

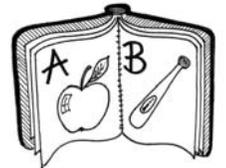
David McKee

Color Box, Tana Hoban

The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Eric Carle

Mrs. Wishy Washy, Joy Cowley

Dinosaur Roar, Paul & Henrietta Strickland



Listen to Songs: Cassette tapes or CDs with rhymes, songs, and games teach both rhythm



and words. Your child may not be able to remember a song or rhyme yet, but after listening to it over and over, he will soon be able to sing along or remember it on his own. "Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush," "Old McDonald," and "Mary Had a Little Lamb" are some favorites.

What Should I Do About "Bad Language?"

Children like to try out new expressions they hear. If you do not like a certain expression, gently tell your child, "We don't use that word," and suggest a better word to express the same feeling. Sometime try ignoring the slang words because your child is really trying out the word to see how you will react. If you don't react at all, he will find words that bring a better reaction.

Sources

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Remember, this developmental mailing describes a typical child at age. Each child is special and each child develops at his or her own pace. Perfectly normal children may do things earlier or later than those described in this mailing. If you are concerned about your child's development, see your medical provider.

This developmental mailing gives equal time and space to both sexes. That's why we take turns referring to children as "he" and "she". When we use he or she, we include all children. Fathers, partners, and other significant adults all play an important role during pregnancy and in childrearing. When we specifically refer to "fathers", the information may also apply to partners and/or other significant adults involved in childrearing.

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