

4 Questions to Ask During Your Child's Back-to-School Physical

With the school year approaching, parents are getting ready to take their children for their back-to-school check-ups. These exams are important to not only avoid preventative issues, but also to regulate pre-existing conditions.

There are several key questions that parents should ask when they bring their child to a family physician for their back-to-school physicals.

"Sometimes children have issues with their current medical issues like asthma, allergies, joint pain and weight problems, so you really want to discuss the child's overall health during this check-up time," says Dr. Latifah Sabree, family medicine physician at Advocate Trinity Hospital in Chicago. "Parents should inquire about proper diet. They should also ask their doctor if the child's height and weight are on target and what type of nutritional foods they should be consuming. This is important as poor nutrition can lead to illness down the road."

Dr. Sabree also suggests the following four questions parents should ask:

- Are there any vaccines my child may need for this visit or in the future?
- What are the available, recommended immunizations?
- Are there any physical or emotional signs I should monitor for in my child at his or her age?
- Is my child's BMI and weight appropriate for their age?

To minimize the risk of any health concerns, Dr. Sabree says it's critical parents and physicians work together to encourage children to lead a healthy, active life.

Prayer: God, help me be an advocate for my child by partnering with my doctor to make sure they stay healthy.

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Don't be Afraid to Talk to Your Doctor

Seeing your doctor, even for a routine exam, can be an intimidating experience. It's common for patients to clam up out of fear of asking "dumb" questions. But don't be shy about communicating with your physician! Doctors say preparing for your visit and coming armed with the right questions will go a long way toward receiving the right care at the right time and avoiding a misdiagnosis.

"As physicians, we know a lot, but there is a lot we don't know — about you," he says. "The more information we have about your health background, the better our chances are at making the right diagnosis and suggesting treatment. No questions should be off-limits."

But how do you bring up those embarrassing topics? Some things are delicate and can be awkward to discuss. Dr. Hampton says there's no reason to be shy.

"We've seen it all and aren't shocked by much," he says. "When you avoid asking sensitive questions out of fear of embarrassment, you run the risk that your doctor might miss a key piece of information that may affect the course of treatment."

Dr. Hampton suggests the following questions as a place to begin with your physician regarding tests and treatments.

- What is this test for?
- How many times have you done this procedure?
- When will I get the results?
- Why do I need this treatment?
- Are there any alternatives?
- What are the possible complications?
- Which hospital is best for my needs?
- How do you spell the name of that drug?
- Are there any side effects?
- Will this medicine interact with medicines that I'm already taking?

"And it's okay to bring a list of written questions with you during your visit," Dr. Hampton says. "We're on your side."

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