Each child is special and develops at a special rate. Like adults, children come in many different sizes and shapes.

**What does a child’s growth tell us?**
The way a child grows tells us a great deal about that child’s health. If a child is having problems with health or nutrition, growth is often affected.

**How do I know if my child is growing okay?**
Your child may be taller or shorter, heavier or lighter than other children of the same age. But changes in height and weight follow a regular pattern. That is why we measure weight and height. For babies we measure their body length when they are lying down. Once toddlers can stand still, we measure their standing height. For babies and toddlers we also measure the size of their head, known as head circumference.

It is best if children have their weight and height measured regularly so we can see how they are growing over time. Then we are also able to compare one child’s growth with other children of the same age and sex. If we measure a child just once that only tells us how big the child is at that particular time.

**How should I keep track of my child’s growth?**
The measurements are put on a growth chart, which looks like a type of graph. As new height and weight measurements are added, we can see if a child is following a natural growth pattern. A growth chart is part of your child’s health record at the health care provider’s office.

**See how your child is growing**: 

- **Good – growing well.**
- **Caution – Not gaining weight. Find out why.**
- **Caution – Gaining weight faster than usual. Find out why.**
- **Dangerous – Losing weight, may be ill. Needs to be seen.**

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How often should my child be weighed and measured?
If possible, have your child weighed and measured:
• within 1-2 weeks of birth
• at 1,2,4,6,9,12,18, 24 months
• between 4-6 years.
Older children and adolescents should also be measured once each year.

Why do some children grow slower or faster than others?
Many things affect the growth of children. Small changes in patterns are normal, especially during the first 2 years of life and during the teenage growth spurt. Growth spurts are part of normal growth and development. Children may be short or thin because their parents are short or thin. If children do not eat enough, growth and weight gain may slow down. They may also become more tired, cranky and have less energy and strength than before. Babies and children who eat well but still grow poorly may have health problems. Weight can get ahead of height for many reasons. If a child is overeating and doesn’t get much exercise, or has a health problem, he child might gain weight very fast.

See your health care provider for more help with these types of concerns.

Do Boys & Girls Grow at Different Rates?
• Children grow the fastest when they are babies. During preschool and the early school years, growth is gradual in both boys and girls.
• During the teenage growth spurt, boys and girls grow quickly as they move from being children to becoming adults.
• Children mature at different ages. Girls generally mature earlier than boys. When they mature, girls gain more fat tissue (breasts, thighs and hips) while boys gain more muscle tissue.
• Teenagers can be very sensitive about their changing bodies. Parents need to tell their teenagers that this process is normal. These reassuring words will have a positive influence on how teenagers feel about their bodies.

Many things affect your child’s growth. Remember that children have their own pattern of growth that is natural for them. Regular weight and height measurements need to be taken to see your child’s special growth pattern.


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