



Developmental Notes - Four Years

Milestones:

By four years of age, most children can pedal a tricycle, hop and balance on one foot, and walk up and down stairs with alternating steps. They can copy a square and can draw a person with three to six body parts. Interactive pretend play, imaginary friends, and recognition of some of the alphabet should also emerge. They should use full sentences with at least six words and their speech should be fully intelligible to strangers. Most four year olds can also brush their own teeth, dress themselves almost completely, and be toilet trained for both urine and bowel movements.

Nutrition:

Refer to www.mypyramid.gov for suggestions on healthy eating and proper food portions.

Ensure your child is eating a well-balanced diet and avoiding “junk foods” which contain too much fat, salt and sugar. At this age, your child may continue to have a poor appetite or finicky food preferences. If so, offer smaller portions while at the same time providing a variety of foods on his plate. This will encourage him to try something new, but do not insist that he eat a full portion of an unfamiliar food. Also, try to make meals a shared family event which allows your child to look forward to the conversation and fun of a family eating together.

Vitamins:

If your child is an extremely finicky eater or drinks less than six ounces of fluoridated water each day, please ask our physicians regarding supplementary vitamins. Continue fluoride supplementation when indicated, and make sure your child brushes his teeth at least twice a day and sees a dentist once to twice a year.

Elimination (Toilet Training):

By age four, most children are fully toilet trained. Nighttime wetting may still occur for some, but no specific interventions are needed. However, it may help to have your child void right before going to bed. Initially you may need to help your child wipe as well as dress and undress himself during the toileting process, but start encouraging your child to manage on his own. For a girl, that involves teaching her to wipe from the front to back especially after bowel movements. Also, dress your child in clothes that can easily be undone such as elastic-waisted pants.

Sleep:

At this age, about fifty percent of children no longer nap. In the evening most will sleep between ten to twelve hours per night. Encourage your child to sleep in his own bed, and create a calm bedtime routine that includes reading or telling stories. This may also encourage language development and pre-reading skills.

Developmental Activities:

Some children by this age have already participated in out-of-home experiences such as nursery school and play groups. Many are also in preschool and preparing for kindergarten. To help your child get ready for school, start by talking to him about how his routine will change and if possible show him the school and the classroom in advance. This can help build enthusiasm and lessen anxiety. Activities to practice prior to starting kindergarten and while in preschool include learning to write his name, sort and classify objects, notice similarities and differences, draw, count, and identify shapes and letters. Also give him first-hand experiences that allow him to see and touch objects, hear new sounds and watch things move.