

# Treehouse "Tots"

## Growth Milestones - FOUR YEARS

### "Growing self-reliance"

Can you believe that four years ago your child was born? Boy, "does time fly when you are having fun." Now you know why your parents used to say that you were growing up too fast. The 4-year-old develops more independence and self-confidence. Before you know it, it will be time to start kindergarten. Do not hesitate to ask any questions you might have about your child's growth and development during the four year checkup. This is the reason for regular well-child exams.

### Parenting and Behavioral

- Always remember the positive effects of praise.
- The 4-year-old will still ask many questions, most of which start with "Why?"
- Watch what you say around your child ... he or she will repeat everything.
- Continue reading books to your child and spending quality time one-on-one.
- Arrange times for safe running and exploring outdoors.
- The 4-year-old really enjoys playmates. Toddlers will begin to play cooperatively others.
- It is normal for children this age to have imaginary friends
- Limit television viewing to one hour per day. Do not use the TV as a baby sitter or it as a substitute for interaction with your child. Watch children's programs with your child when possible.
- Do not worry if your child becomes curious about body parts. This is normal at this age. Always use the correct terms for genitals. Modesty and a desire for privacy begin to emerge at this age.
- Discipline should be firm and consistent, but loving and understanding. Praise your child for his or her good behavior and accomplishments.
- Continue to allow your 4-year-old to make choices whenever possible but the choices should be limited to those you can live with ("red shirt or green shirt"). Never ask a 4-year-old an open question ("Do you want to take a bath") unless you are willing to accept their answer.
- Use the two "I's" of discipline (ignore or isolate) rather than the two "S's" (shouting or spanking). When disciplining, try to separate your child and his or her behavior ("I love you, but I do not like it when you touch the TV.")
- Provide your 4-year-old with clearly stated limits along with an explanation of the consequences if rules are broken.
- Your child may continue to use a security object (such as a blanket, favorite stuffed toy, night light, etc.). This is normal and your youngster will give up the item when he or she is ready,
- If you are expecting another baby, discuss with your child's physician how to prepare your 4-year-old.
- Allow your child to participate in setting and cleaning up the table. Always praise him or her for a job well done.
- Provide some type of structured learning environment in preparation for kindergarten next year. Examples include preschool, Head Start or Sunday School. Show an interest in your child's preschool activities.

### Development

- Speech is almost always understandable.
- Can usually count from 1 to 10.
- Can walk on tiptoes, climb a ladder and ride a tricycle.
- May name and match three or four primary colors.
- Knows his own name.
- Correctly uses the pronoun "I."

- Children this age recognize gender differences and will correctly say "I am a girl" or "I am a boy."
- Can dress and undress with supervision but still have trouble with laces and buttons. They also begin to be selective about what they wear.
- Holds and uses a pencil with good control. Can copy a cross, circle and possibly a square.
- Can to draw a person with a face, arms and legs.
- Engages in conversational "give-and-take."
- Can sing a song.
- Talks about his day's activities and experiences.
- Can identify emotions such as sadness, anger, anxiety and fear.

### **Oral Health**

- Supervise brushing twice a day with a small amount of fluoridated toothpaste.
- Take your 4-year-old to the dentist again this year and schedule re-checks as recommended by the dentist.
- If the child sucks his or her fingers or thumb, ask the dentist how to discourage these habits. Stop pacifier use.
- Continue giving a fluoride supplement if your drinking water is not fluoridated. Some dentists recommend fluoride be continued through age 8; others recommend continuing through age 12 or 16. Check with your pediatrician and dentist.
- Learn how to prevent dental injuries and what to do in case of a dental emergency, especially the loss or fracture of a tooth.

### **Feeding**

- The 4-year-old continues in a period of relatively slow growth. Average weight gain per year is only three to four pounds. Provide snacks rich in carbohydrates and limit high-fat, low nutrient foods.
- The 4-year-old can and usually insists on feeding himself.
- Mealtime should be pleasant and food should never be forced. Provide nutritious foods and let your child decide what and how much to eat. Offer small portions with the availability of a second helping.
- The 4-year-old will often imitate peers in food likes and dislikes.
- Eat dinner together as a family whenever possible.
- Insist on good table manners and encourage pleasant conversation during meals.
- Turn the TV off during meals.

### **Sleep**

- An afternoon nap may still be necessary.
- Fears of the dark, thunder, lightning, etc. are quite common at this age.
- Maintain a consistent bedtime routine, using a night light, security blanket or toy are all ways to help lessen night time fears.
- Nightmares can wake a child up from sleep. They can be triggered by changes or stress. Reassure your child and put him back to bed.

**Immunizations** *Since immunization schedules vary from doctor to doctor, and new vaccines may have been introduced, it is always best to seek the advice of your child's health care provider concerning your child's vaccine schedule.*

- Some physicians will give the child DTaP#5, IPV #4, Varicella #2 and MMR#2 at this checkup. Other doctors wait until the five year checkup. Both schedules are acceptable.
- Annual flu vaccines may be recommended for children. Check with your doctor.
- If the child can cooperate or a problem is suspected, vision and hearing will also be checked. The child's blood pressure will be recorded.

## **Toilet Training**

- By age 4, 95 percent of children are bowel trained.
- By age 4, 90 percent of children are dry in the daytime and 75 percent at night.

## **Safety**

- Your child continues to require close supervision. Accidents continue to be the principal cause of death in children in this age group.
- Know where your child is at all times.
- If your home uses gas appliances, install and maintain carbon monoxide detectors.
- Trampoline use is not recommended because of the risk of serious injury.
- Insist that your home and car be smoke free.
- Electrical tools, firearms, matches and poisons should be locked up, out of reach.
- The child should not have unsupervised access to, or ride a bike in, the street. Insist on helmet use.
- Some 4-year-olds can be taught their full name, address and phone number.
- Continue to use a car seat or booster seat secured properly until the child weighs at least 60 pounds or his or her head is higher than the back of the rear seat.
- Always walk behind your car before backing out of the driveway.
- Many 4-year-olds are fairly good "swimmers," but still need supervision. Ensure that your child wears a life vest if boating.
- There is no such thing as a "child proof cap." Ingestion of toxic substances is common at this age. Never buy toys or other objects that can cut or ingested. Suffocation by plastic bags and balloons still occurs at this age.
- Be especially careful when using power lawn mowers and other power tools.
- Test smoke detectors to ensure they are working properly.
- Continue to use a water proof sunscreen on your child before he or she goes outside. If possible, avoid the hours between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. when the sun is the most dangerous.
- Advise your 4-year-old to be careful around strange dogs, especially ones that are eating.
- Begin to teach your child not to talk to strangers or accept food from strangers.
- Teach your child pedestrian safety ("look both ways before crossing the street").

## **Illnesses**

- The 4-year-old experiences less respiratory infections, such as colds, ear infections and sinus infections than the previous year. Begin to teach good habits: washing his hands after using the toilet, putting his hands in front of his mouth before coughing or sneezing, and washing his hands after coughing or sneezing.
- Remember, most illnesses at this age are viral, which means antibiotics will not shorten the course of the illness.

*The information presented in Growth Milestones was obtained with the help of our pediatric experts and with material from The American Academy of Pediatrics' Guidelines for Health Supervision and Bright Futures' Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents. Bright Futures is supported by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.*