Kids’ health questions? Check out these 8 doctor-approved resources

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Timothy M. Smith

Contributing News Writer

Every parent knows to expect their kids to bring home colds and other common maladies from daycare or school, but less common health conditions can quickly fill their minds with questions. Don’t rely on social media for answers to these questions—look instead to experts who have been at the leading edge of medical research for decades.

The JAMA Network® has created easy-to-understand Patient Pages drawing on content from *JAMA®,* one of the world’s top general medical journals—as well as a dozen other peer-reviewed journals published by the AMA to make the most accurate, up-to-date medical information available to patients just like you.

Patient Pages provide basic definitions of conditions or issues, along with details of symptoms, consequences, diagnosis, treatment and prevention. These resources, illustrated by *JAMA* medical illustrators, are always free to access.

This article highlights Patient Pages relevant to children’s health conditions, including some you might not expect to be discussing with your pediatrician.

1 “What Parents Need to Know About Online Misinformation”

“Having information at your fingertips can be exciting and empowering. However, just because information is easy to find online, it does not mean it is

URL: https://patients.ama-assn.org/kids-health-questions-check-out-these-8-doctor-approved-resources

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always correct. Some information online is not accurate (called misinformation) because it has not been fact-checked. Other information can be intentionally untrue (called disinformation). This can make it hard for families to find helpful, correct information for children, teens and adults," the Patient Page explains.

In fact, media literacy has become an indispensable parenting skill, it notes.

"Media literacy means being able to critically analyze what is written or presented in the media," it says. "Practicing media literacy helps parents set an example for children to be informed media consumers."

The Patient Page then gives three tips for finding accurate health information online.

Use reliable sources. "Look for information from established healthcare organizations, educational institutions or government agencies. These websites often end in .org, .edu or .gov. Be careful of commercial websites (ending in .com), which may not provide objective or reliable information."

Check references. "Pay attention to the quality of references cited in the article. All articles should have sources cited for transparency and fact-checking. Are they from well-known scientific journals? Have they been peer-reviewed, meaning other experts agree to its merit? Or are they from websites where information cannot be verified?"

Consider the author's credentials. "The author should have expertise in the topic area. For example, a medical doctor might write about medicine. However, be aware that experts in one area may not have the same knowledge in another. For instance, a surgeon may not be as knowledgeable about vaccines as an immunologist."

2 "What Parents Should Know About Food and Food Insecurity for Their Families"

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“Providing for children has always been a challenge, but parents have had to struggle more to obtain food since the COVID-19 pandemic,” the Patient Page says, adding that this is most commonly due to difficulty in getting to a full-service grocery store and/or affording food.

“Food insecurity, or not having enough nutritious food to eat, is common in the U.S., with about 33 million people who may not have enough food to provide for their family,” it says. “This leads to poor physical and mental health and increased hospitalizations, especially for children. Five million of these individuals who experience food insecurity are children.”

The Patient Page notes that many physicians and health professionals are new to addressing food insecurity, but you should trust your pediatrician to help you access nutritious food as medical treatment.

“In addition to discussing growth, development and physical and mental health at clinic visits, pediatricians also want to understand challenges that get in the way of healthy living for you and your children, such as food insecurity. At your routine pediatric appointments, let your pediatrician know if food insecurity is a problem for you. If your child is hospitalized, let your medical team know if you are experiencing food insecurity in the hospital,” it says.

Don’t miss this takeaway: “If you and your family have food insecurity, your medical team is there to partner with you to access nutritious food.”

3 “What Parents Need to Know About Head Injury and Concussions”

“Common symptoms of concussion include headaches, dizziness, tiredness, nausea, vision changes, mental fog and changes in concentration,” the Patient Page says.

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“The brain is a soft organ that can be injured by strong forces to the head,” it explains. "Concussions can be due to direct blows to the head or strong back-and-forth movements that hurt the brain. Concussions in children and teens are most often caused by injuries during sports and other activities. The highest risk is from contact sports, such as American football, rugby, ice hockey, soccer and lacrosse, and activities like cheerleading, bicycling, skateboarding, ice skating and skiing. Many of these sports require helmets to try to prevent concussions for this reason.”

It goes on to describe some of the symptoms.

“Concussions change how the brain works for a period of time and can cause a variety of symptoms. Symptoms can happen right away, take minutes or develop hours after the brain injury. The most common symptoms are headache, dizziness, tiredness, nausea, mental fog, vision changes and sensitivity to light or noise. Mental fog symptoms include trouble with concentration, focusing, memory and following instructions. There can be loss of consciousness or a brief episode of passing out right after the brain injury; if this happens, the child needs to see a physician as soon as possible. Teach children that they must tell a coach or caregiver about these symptoms immediately,” the Patient Page says.

Don’t miss this takeaway: “The most important first steps are getting help early after a concussion and making sure there are no serious head, eye or neck injuries. If a concussion happens during sport participation, the child must be removed from play immediately and must be cleared by a physician before returning to activities and sports.”

4 “Chest Pain in Children”

“While chest pain in adults is frequently caused by serious cardiovascular problems, chest pain in children is often innocent. Research shows less than

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1% of chest pain in children stems from the heart itself," the Patient Page says, noting that the many non-heart-related causes include asthma, acid reflux and anxiety.

Still, if a child is experiencing chest pain, "pediatric clinicians will take a full history, collect vital signs and perform a physical examination. Your child may need testing, including a chest radiograph to see inside the chest and an electrocardiogram to look at the heart rhythm. Blood work may also be needed," it says.

The Patient Page then explains that if a heart-related cause is suspected, you will need a referral to a heart specialist called a pediatric cardiologist, who will repeat a full history and physical examination and may order additional tests.

"Be reassured that most evaluations for chest pain at the pediatric cardiology office do not find any issues," it says. "However, it is important to have the full assessment to rule out any heart conditions."

Don't miss this takeaway: "Occasionally, children get sicker and may need evaluation sooner in the hospital, and they can see a pediatric cardiologist there."

5 "What Parents Need to Know About Autism Screening and Early Treatment"

Every child grows at his or her own pace, the Patient Page notes.

"By knowing and understanding how they play, learn and behave, you, with your pediatrician, can help your child. As they get older, it is important to keep track of skills that they are and are not able to do," it says.

Key among them are social and communication skills.

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“Autism is a developmental disability that may affect a child’s ability to communicate, their behavior and their social skills, the Patient Page says. The three most common things to look out for if you think your child might have autism are 1) lack of attention skills, 2) language delays and differences, and 3) regression of skills.”

It goes on to explain that pediatricians “usually screen for autism at a child’s 18-month and 24-month checkups, or whenever you or others have concerns with how your child is growing. A child can be diagnosed with autism at any age. Research has shown that the sooner you get your child into an early treatment program, the better your child may do in school and in other aspects of their life. A diagnosis of autism helps teachers and parents create individual ways to help the child learn and interact with peers.”

Don’t miss this takeaway: “If you or your child’s pediatrician thinks your child might be behind in their development, either of you can refer your child to therapies like physical, occupational or speech therapy. Your child does not need to have an autism diagnosis to receive these therapies.”

6 “What Parents Should Understand About Lipid Screening in Children”

“Pediatricians, parents and caregivers need to decide whether to screen all children for high blood lipid levels, screen only those with risk factors or wait until they are adults,” the Patient Page says.

“High lipid levels in adults can lead to heart disease, blockages in the blood vessels to the legs (peripheral artery disease) and stroke,” it says. “Taking medication to lower lipid levels reduces these risks. Therefore, screening adults for high lipid levels is common practice.”

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In childhood, however, “screening for high lipid levels is more complicated,” but it can detect two conditions, the Patient Page notes.

“The first is a rare genetic condition called familial hypercholesterolemia,” it says. “This condition puts people at high risk for myocardial infarction (heart attack), peripheral artery disease, stroke and early death. Familial hypercholesterolemia is usually passed down from one of the child’s biological parents. Approximately one in 250 people have this genetic condition. Unfortunately, genetic testing for familial hypercholesterolemia is not widely available. It is also hard to test for because at least three different gene variants can cause it.

“The second condition is called multifactorial dyslipidemia, and it is common. It is linked to a high-fat diet, lack of exercise and being overweight. Since myocardial infarctions and strokes rarely happen in childhood, it is hard to know if screening all children for high lipid levels does more good than harm.”

Don’t miss this takeaway: “Parents and caregivers should be involved in deciding whether to screen their child for high lipid levels. The child’s pediatrician should discuss the benefits and risks of lipid screening.”

7 “Dental Caries in Adults, Adolescents and Children”

“Dental caries, commonly known as cavities or tooth decay, is caused by the breakdown of the outer layer of the tooth (enamel),” the Patient Page says.

“Cavities can develop when bacteria and sugar on the teeth produce substances that erode tooth enamel. Risk factors for cavities include inadequate toothbrushing and flossing, consuming sugary foods and drinks, smoking and excessive alcohol use,” it says.

It goes on to explain what screening for dental caries involves.

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“The term *screening* means looking for a condition or illness in individuals who do not have specific symptoms or concerns related to that illness,” the Patient Page says, adding that this can be performed by a primary care doctor or an oral health professional, such as a dentist.

“You can reduce your chance of getting cavities by brushing and flossing your teeth regularly, limiting sugar-rich foods and drinks in your diet, and not smoking,” it says.

Don’t miss this takeaway: “Other treatments sometimes used to prevent cavities include fluoride treatments, antimicrobial mouthwashes, tooth sealants and silver diamine fluoride. However, there is limited evidence on the effectiveness of these treatments in the primary care setting.”

8 “What Parents Should Know About Bugs and Bug Repellents”

“Insect repellents protect you and your child against mosquitos, ticks and some flies to prevent insect bites and insect-borne diseases,” the Patient Page says.

It then summarizes how applying bug repellent fits into a larger approach to protecting your children against insect bites.

“Try to avoid areas with lots of insects, including areas with high grass or still water where mosquitos breed. The time of day can matter. Mosquitoes bite more frequently during dusk and dawn. When outdoors, wear long pants, a wide-brimmed hat, lightweight long sleeves, socks, and closed-toed shoes. Using mosquito netting over strollers and beds is also protective. Avoid wearing bright colors and floral prints, as these typically attract bugs. Lastly, apply bug repellent,” it says.

The Patient Page also advises to keep in mind that repellents only keep biting insects away—they do not kill bugs.

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> “After you are done with an outdoor activity, always check your child’s skin for ticks,” it says.
>
> Don’t miss this takeaway: “Store bug repellents out of a child’s reach, as they can be toxic if ingested.”

Get more expert advice from expert AMA-member physicians on common children’s health issues in the AMA's What Doctors Want Patients to Know™ series, which gives doctors a platform to share what they want patients to understand about today's healthcare headlines and how to take charge of their health through preventive care.

Find out what doctors want parents to know about:

- When to seek emergency care.
- Family immunizations.
- Concussions.
- Cutting down on screen time and social media’s health impact.
- Mosquito bites and tickborne illnesses.
- High cholesterol.

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