



MAY 2006
 THE BABY COLLEGE®
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 Marilyn Joseph, Director

HARLEM CHILDREN'S ZONE

the Baby College® connection



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Greetings, Graduates:

As the summer approaches, I ask that you save the following date:

Saturday, August 12th will be our fifth annual **Family Day**. It will be a fun-filled day with lots of games and nutritious foods. Check your mail for a letter regarding Family Day. It is important that you respond to the letter quickly so that you can be included. Due to the limited seating, we must hear from you before June 19th.

Also, this summer will be our 12th annual **HCZ Peace March**. This will be another opportunity to enjoy the great weather and the growth of your child while acknowledging the need for peace on the streets.

I would like to thank Dr. Marx for her contributions to *The Baby College Connection* this month. I encourage you to read her insightful and helpful answers to your questions.

Lastly, I would like to welcome **Abasi Clark** as the new Assistant Director at The Baby College. Her predecessor, Amber Cartwright, is currently the Director of the HCZ Harlem Gems Head Start program.

Additionally, we say good bye and good luck to outreach workers Frantzy Charles and Kim Benetith, who have left The Baby College to take on new challenges. If either Frantzy or Kim were your outreach workers, please stop by for information on your new worker.

Happy reading and I look forward to sharing time with you and your family this summer.

MARILYN JOSEPH
 Program Director

ASK THE DOCTOR: FIRST VISITS WITH YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Starting off right



Illustration: Derranie Henderson, age 16

By Terry Marx, M.D.,
 The Children's Health Fund

Q: How should I get ready for my child's first visit to a pediatrician?

A: Get paper and a pencil and keep a list of questions or concerns that come up at home. Bring this list with you to the visit, and write down the answers you get. Coming in with questions and sharing information on how your baby is doing will help you benefit from every visit. Don't be embarrassed about asking questions you worry may be silly or stupid. A good pediatric provider understands that all parents, and particularly new parents, have many questions.

The more engaged the family is, the more they get out of the pediatrician. If you come in with even routine questions and feel like they were satisfactorily answered, then it gives you a clue as to whether this provider is going to be the right match for you. If

something serious came up for your child down the line you would want to be able to ask many questions and get all the help you could from that pediatrician. So, if they can't or won't give you answers to the everyday general baby questions it should make you think that they may not be helpful if, unfortunately, your child should get really sick.

The other thing is to do a lot of reading. There are a lot of baby-care books out there that will help you so you don't have wait for the pediatric visit, or take up all the time at the visit with questions you can answer yourself. Browse through books at the library or a bookstore. If you are unsure about what books to read, ask the folks at The Baby College office for advice. Also, the American Academy of Pediatrics website (www.aap.org) has lots of information for parents.

Finally, it helps to bring along other adults who are helping you care

Send a
 picture
 of your newborn
baby
 to the
 Baby College office

Starting off right

for the baby to this and all visits. Ideally, both parents should come to the pediatrician visits. It keeps fathers involved and supportive, helps keep otherwise helpful relatives from meddling against medical advice, and helps you ask questions and remember what the answers were.

Q: When should my child's first visit to the pediatrician be?

A: The child's first visit is usually soon after birth, and is within the first 1-2 weeks after delivery. The timing of that visit will often depend on how long the baby was in the hospital after birth, and whether there were any significant medical issues during the delivery period. This visit is primarily to make sure that the baby is feeding well and gaining weight, that no new medical issues have developed, and that everyone is adjusting to life with a new baby.

After the initial visit, the usual schedule of pediatric appointments is linked to the schedule of immunizations, and in the first two years visits are usually at 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18 and 24 months of age. The next visit is typically at 3 years old (although some providers may schedule a visit during the second year), and then after age 3, yearly checkups are recommended into the school-age years. Parents should always feel free to call or make an appointment and come in if they have concerns. Similarly, pediatricians may also schedule an appointment in between these routine visits to follow up on something that may have been a concern at the last visit.

An important visit to consider even before the baby is born is a pediatric pre-natal visit, which many pediatric providers offer. This is an appointment that you schedule toward the end of your pregnancy that is like an interview of the pediatrician, to see if this where

you will want to bring your baby. You talk with the pediatrician, find out how to use the office, and ask questions that will be important for you and the baby in the first few days of life. This is where you can ask if there are weekend or evening hours, if there is a telephone answering service for when the office is closed, how you make appointments, if you can be seen the same day if your child is sick, if you will usually see the same or different doctors, and any other questions that will help you decide if this is the right place for you. In addition, their answers to questions about things such as breastfeeding, sleeping and other issues of concern will help you find out whether you even like this doctor and want to return.

Q. How do I find the best doctor for my baby?

A: There are many many excellent doctors in New York City. What is important is to find out if this provider will truly offer a "medical home." Doctors use the term "medical home" to mean a practice that provides continuous, comprehensive and compassionate health care for families. In other words, a medical home has many regular hours during the week to be seen, has after-hours and weekend consultations to avoid emergency rooms, sees children for both sick and well visits, manages brief illnesses such as throat infections as well as chronic illnesses such as asthma, helps the family coordinate sub-specialists, school issues and community services when they are necessary. In short, it is the kind of practice that knows you and your children, and gives you the support and respect you need to raise healthy children. A medical home is not really a place or a building; it is a style and approach to providing good primary care pediatrics. The Children's Health Fund incorporates this model of care into its mission and believes that families should receive continuous, comprehensive and compassionate health care.

Q: What is a "well check"?

A: A "well check," also known as a "well child visit," is a check-up to make sure everything is going well for the baby and the parents. It is based on the understanding that pediatrics is, by and large, a preventive field of medicine. Babies are changing, growing and developing, so we see them for "well checks" periodically to help make sure that the baby is, in fact, doing well. The idea is to catch things that may be going wrong in time to prevent a more serious problem. The needs of the baby and the parents change as the baby grows up, so typically the well check is for reviewing issues that are important to the baby's overall health, and anticipating things that are about to happen as the child gets older.

Some of the topics that are typically talked about at a well child visit are feeding and nutrition, development,

sleep, behavior, and illnesses. As the child gets older it should include things like school, physical activity, social and emotional issues and many others. In addition to talking through this medical history, a complete physical exam is done, including measurements of the child's height, weight and head, and the physical exam from the head to toes. At various ages, immunizations are given to prevent illnesses, and specific tests may be done such as blood tests for anemia and lead poisoning, vision and hearing screenings, blood pressure and others. All of these are on based on a schedule of recommendations. Finally, because babies follow somewhat predictable patterns of growth and development, we can anticipate what lays ahead for the baby and family, and help parents know what to expect in the coming months. For example, we often talk about safety issues in early childhood because babies may develop new motor skills that parents may not be ready for, which can lead to serious accidents.

Other topics could include issues such as ways to stimulate language development (by talking to and reading to your baby), healthy ways to feed your child, normal behavior issues such as stranger anxiety and temper tantrums. These well child visits are really an essential part of keeping babies healthy, so it's important to make and keep these appointments on schedule.

Q: Why do I see a different doctor at each visit?

A: In a lot of offices and clinics never seeing the same doctor twice is, unfortunately, quite common. Some places have pediatricians who work part-time and so the same person may not be there every day of the week. Other places are teaching settings where they have doctors who are learning more advanced pediatric skills, so they may only be in that office once a week or so. So for scheduled visits you may be able to see the same person, at least for as long as they are in their training. For sick visits, you may have to see someone else. There are many families that are satisfied with that arrangement. But if you are not, there are other options in the community that will enable you to see either the same doctor, or at least a small group of doctors so you know two or three. Ideally having the same provider who knows you and watches your baby grow up over time allows the family and pediatrician to develop a strong and trusting relationship. ■

Dr. Terry Marx is the Medical Director of The Harlem Children's Health Project (HCHP), a school-based health center located in The Harlem Children's Zone's headquarters. The HCHP is a program of The Children's Health Fund, New York-Presbyterian and Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health. For more information about HCHP, visit www.childrenshealthfund.org.

WORD PUZZLE

Can you unscramble these? The first 10 people to bring in the answers to The Baby College Office will receive a gift. Hint: All the words can be found in the lead article.

THGEIW

NITUORE

LTHYAEH

TYFESA

LACDEMI

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