

# Kids health: Prevention and early screenings pay off

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Strabismus is also best treated early, said Madion. "Parents sometimes think it will go away or the child's too young to bring in. Neither is true."

Glasses may correct the problem, but outpatient surgery to move the position of the eye muscle may be required.

Parents should watch for visual attentiveness of babies. Do they fixate and follow? Do eye movements look normal? Are their eyes straight? As children grow, Madion recommends eye protection for all contact sports — polycarbonate non-breakable lenses — particularly if the child has had strabismus or amblyopia.

"If you have any questions or kids say they're not seeing well, bring them in," said Madion. "If we can catch and treat something early, we've really helped a kid out a lot."

### Youthful well-being

Kate McIntosh, M.D., a pediatrician at Crystal Lake Health Center, says two of the biggest issues for children are asthma and obesity. Asthma is an increasingly prevalent problem, said McIntosh. It is fueled by northern Michigan's air pollution-high ozone levels, cigarette and wood smoke and outdoor allergens.

Early signs of asthma include a chronic nighttime cough, shortness of breath during exercise and difficulty breathing when sick or exposed to smoke, allergens or weather changes. Prompt diagnosis is important, said McIntosh.

"We now know that if you can treat a child with preventive medicines, not just after they're wheezing, the child can have a completely normal life and exercise pattern. And we now know the lung behaves like a sprained ankle (you're more likely to keep spraining it because it becomes unstable). If we can prevent an attack for a longer period of time, we increase the possibility that the child will outgrow it."

McIntosh added one caveat: "If the family smokes, I won't be able to return the child to normal health."

Citing the effects of second-hand smoke, she listed a higher rate of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, increased ear infections, more and severe colds, allergies and asthma.

"The number one thing parents can do to help a child's health, period, is to stop smoking," said McIntosh.

At a recent conference, McIntosh learned that between 40 and 60 percent of American children are overweight. At the current rate, by 2030, that figure will grow to 90 percent. She cited fast food, soda pop, eating on the go, processed foods and portion size as the culprits. Their partners in crime are television, video games, computers and the Internet and our "culture of sedentariness."

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children get at least two hours of physical play everyday.

"The numbers are clear. Turn off the TV and kids will lose an average of 10 to 15 pounds," she said.

Cut out pop from a diet that's otherwise equally balanced between caloric intake and output and children will lose 25 pounds, says the Academy.

## Northern Michigan Pediatric Dentistry

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Dr. James M. Van Wingen

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