

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE AND WHAT SHOULD BE AVOIDED FOR A CHILD'S PROPER GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Childhood is a crucial phase of life, marked by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. Providing the right environment and avoiding harmful influences are essential for ensuring healthy growth. Both modern science and Ayurveda emphasize that balanced nutrition, proper daily routines, a safe environment, and emotional stability play significant roles in shaping a child's future health.

This article outlines recommended practices (“Do’s”) and harmful factors (“Don’ts”) for optimal child development, supported by classical Ayurvedic texts and modern pediatric guidelines.

What Should Be Done for Proper Growth and Development

1. Provide Balanced and Nutritious Food^[1,2,5,8,11]

A child's diet should include whole grains, fruits, vegetables, milk, ghee, nuts, pulses, and seasonal foods. Ayurveda

recommends *Laghu* and easily digestible foods for young children and Ghrita & Ksheer for nourishment. Adequate protein supports muscle and organ growth, while vitamins and minerals aid in cognitive and bone development & adequate water to stay hydrated.

2. Establish a Healthy Daily Routine (Dinacharya)^[3,7,8,14]

Regular sleep and wake-up times help regulate hormones and improve immunity. Ayurveda stresses the importance of Brahmanuhurta waking, adequate sleep (8–12 hours), and avoiding daytime sleep in older children. Light physical activities such as play, running, or yoga help maintain physical fitness.

3. Encourage Physical Activity and Outdoor Play^[2,10]

Outdoor play supports bone strength, coordination, and healthy circulation. Activities such as running, cycling, skipping, yoga, and team games help improve: Motor skills, Physical fitness, Social skill Confidence. Sunlight exposure boosts Vitamin D, essential for skeletal growth.

4. Emotional Support and Positive Environment^[10]

Children thrive in an environment of love, encouragement, and security. Ayurveda highlights Sattvik Aahara-Vihara and calm surroundings to promote mental well-being.

5. Maintain Proper Hygiene and Prevent Illness^[5,16]

Handwashing, bathing, clean surroundings, brush teeth twice a day and safe drinking water reduce risk of infections. Regular health check-ups and vaccinations are also important & Immunization (as per NIS) protects against preventable diseases.]

6. Adequate Rest and Sleep^[3,7,12]

Sleep is essential for brain development, memory consolidation, and hormonal regulation. Both Ayurveda and modern pediatric science consider sleep a major pillar of health (Nidra).

7. Encourage Learning and Skill Development^[10,14]

Age-appropriate books, puzzles, activities, and social interaction enhance cognitive and language development.

What Should Be Avoided for Healthy Growth and Development

I. Junk Food and Excessive Sugar^[1,4,6,8,14,15]

Fast food, packaged snacks, soft drinks, and processed items lead to obesity, poor concentration, Weaken immunity and nutrient deficiencies. Ayurveda advises avoiding Guru, Ati-amla, Ati-Lavana (excess sour and salty), and Viruddha Ahara (incompatible foods).

II. Sedentary Lifestyle & Excess Screen Time^[1]

Long screen hours affect vision, posture, sleep cycles, and concentration. WHO recommends limiting screen time to <1 hour/day for children under 5, and controlled use for older children.

III. Exposure to Stressful or Negative Environment^[4,10]

Harsh parenting, shouting, emotional neglect, or family conflicts harm mental and emotional development. Ayurveda states that a child must be raised in Sattvic, calm, and nurturing surroundings.

IV. Skipping Meals or Irregular Eating Habits^[5,15]

Irregular meal timings weaken digestion (Agni) and may lead to malnutrition.

V. Excessive Cold Drinks and Junk Milk Products^[2,5]

Cold drinks weaken digestion and immunity. Ayurveda warns against Ati-Sheetala Ahara in children.

VI. Lack of Physical Activity^[10,12,13]

Restricting play leads to poor physical development, low stamina, and behavioral issues.

VII. Overburdening with Academics^[10]

Overexertion can cause stress, anxiety, and reduced interest in learning. Balanced study-play is essential.

VIII. Irregular Sleep and Late Nights^[7,12]

Sleeping late or not sleeping enough can disturb Growth hormone release, Memory, Mood & Immunity. Children should avoid late-night activities.

IX. Exposure to Harmful Substances^[14]

Cigarette smoke, Polluted air, Dangerous chemicals or sprays, Dirty and unsafe surroundings. These can harm lungs, immunity, and overall health.

Diseases That May Occur if a Child Does Not Follow the Recommended Do's and Don'ts**1. Diseases Due to Improper or Unbalanced Diet****1.1 Malnutrition (Undernutrition)^[1,2,5,6,8,9,10,11]**

Lack of essential nutrients, irregular meals, and poor food quality can lead to malnutrition, causing stunted growth, weak immunity, delayed milestones, and poor cognitive performance.

1.2 Childhood Obesity^[12]

Excessive junk food, sugar intake, and sedentary behavior contribute to early-onset obesity. This increases the risk of diabetes, hypertension, and liver problems in adolescence.

1.3 Iron Deficiency Anemia^[15]

Poor-quality diet, lack of leafy vegetables, and frequent junk food consumption reduce iron absorption, leading to anemia, fatigue, irritability, and poor concentration.

1.4 Rickets / Vitamin D Deficiency^[15]

Lack of sunlight exposure and insufficient calcium and Vitamin D intake cause weak bones, delayed walking, and skeletal deformities.

2. Digestive System Disorders From Irregular Meals and Poor Food Habits**2.1 Agnimandya (Weak Digestion)^[3,9]**

Irregular meal timing, overeating, and consumption of cold, heavy, or processed foods weaken digestive fire (Agni). This leads to indigestion, bloating, and poor nutrient absorption.

2.2 Constipation^[12]

Low-fiber diet, insufficient water intake, and physical inactivity contribute to chronic constipation in children.

3. Diseases Due to Poor Hygiene and Low Immunity

3.1 Recurrent Respiratory Infections^[7]

Lack of hygiene, weak immunity due to poor diet, and unclean surroundings lead to frequent colds, cough, bronchitis, and pneumonia.

3.2 Diarrhea and Gastroenteritis^[7]

Contaminated food or water, unwashed hands, and unhygienic habits commonly result in diarrhea, dehydration, and nutritional deficiencies.

4. Disorders Due to Excessive Screen Time and Sedentary Lifestyle

4.1 Myopia (Short-sightedness)^[12]

Prolonged screen exposure and reduced outdoor play are major causes of early-onset myopia in children.

4.2 Postural Problems^[12,13]

Long sitting hours and incorrect posture during study or mobile use contribute to neck pain, back pain, and spine issues.

5. Mental and Behavioural Disorders

5.1 Anxiety, Irritability, and Emotional Instability^[10,13]

Living in a stressful or negative environment, lack of emotional support, or harsh parenting can cause behavioural issues, anxiety, and poor social adjustment.

5.2 Attention and Learning Difficulties^[10,12,13]

High screen time, poor nutrition, lack of sleep, and inadequate stimulation can negatively affect concentration, memory, and learning capacity.

6. Delayed Growth and Development^[1,4,8,15]

Failure to provide adequate nutrition, stimulation, playtime, and healthcare may lead to delayed walking, talking, or cognitive development.

7. Lifestyle Disorders in Older Children^[8,16]

Poor lifestyle habits, especially lack of exercise and excessive junk food, may result in early-onset lifestyle diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, fatty liver disease, and hypertension.

CONCLUSION

Child development is a holistic process influenced by food, lifestyle, emotional well-being, environment, and parental care. Both Ayurvedic wisdom and modern science highlight the need for nutritious food, regular routines, hygiene, play, and emotional security. Avoiding junk food, harmful habits, stress, and irregular lifestyles helps ensure that the child grows into a physically strong, mentally alert, and emotionally stable individual. Ensuring a balance between what to do and what to avoid lays the foundation for lifelong health and well-being. The diseases that arise from not following proper diet, hygiene, emotional care, and healthy routines highlight the importance of a holistic upbringing. Ayurveda emphasizes balanced food, stable emotions, and daily routine as pillars of health, while modern pediatrics stresses nutrition, hygiene, and physical activity. Together, they guide parents to safeguard children from preventable diseases and support optimum growth and development.

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