

## Your child's growth

When you are given information about your child's weight, length or percentile on a growth chart, do you know what these numbers really mean? Often, hearing these numbers can lead to worry and anxiety about how your child is growing.



### Monitoring growth

If there is a problem with a child's health or nutrition, it usually affects their growth. Growth charts help identify if there are concerns with the way a child is growing and whether there are any nutrition or health problems.

Ask your child's health care provider to measure your child's weight and length/height at all well-baby and well-child appointments. They can record the measurements on a growth chart as:

- Weight for age
- Length/height for age
- Weight for length for children less than two years of age
- Body Mass Index (BMI) for children two years of age or more

Measuring and recording your child's weight and length/height one time is not enough. One measurement only shows where your child is at a specific point in time and does not describe if they are growing at a healthy rate. Growth

measures have meaning when they are recorded over a period of time. This shows if your child is growing at the rate that is best for their body.

### World Health Organization (WHO) growth charts for Canada

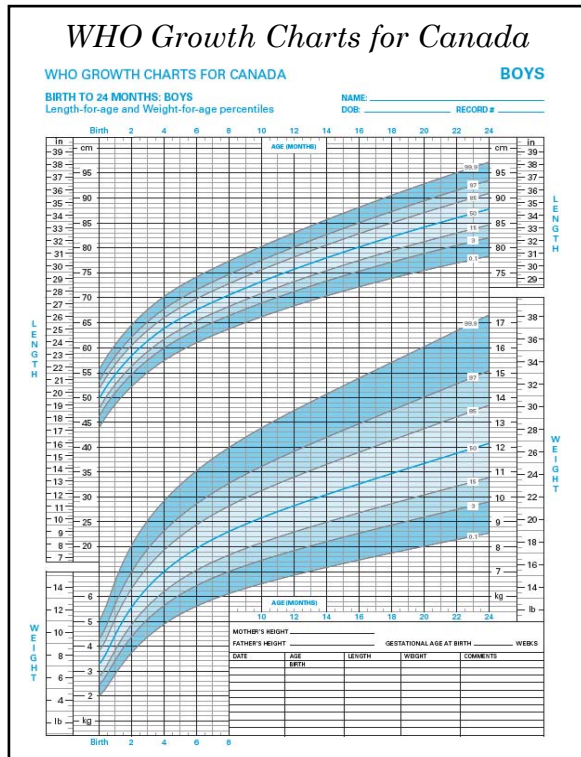
In 2010, leading health organizations, including the Canadian Paediatric Society, announced that health care providers in Canada should use the WHO growth charts to monitor growth.

The WHO growth charts show how all children in Canada should grow. The charts were made using children from different ethnic backgrounds who had optimal health care and nutrition.

Some health care providers still use the United States Centres for Disease Control (CDC) growth charts. These charts are not the best way to measure growth. For example, the CDC charts can make an exclusively breastfed baby look like they are not growing well. This can lead to incorrect feeding advice including:

- Starting solid foods too early
- Supplementing with infant formula

Did you know that breastfed babies grow faster in the first few months, then slow down, compared to formula-fed babies?



The CDC growth charts may also not catch a child who is gaining weight too quickly and at risk of being overweight.

### A word about the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile

Parents often think that the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile is the goal for every child. This is untrue. Healthy children come in many shapes and sizes. A steady growth pattern over time is more important than a single percentile measurement.

### What to do if your child's growth is too fast or too slow

The first thing to keep in mind is that this is not a reflection of you as a parent or caregiver. Talk to the health care provider that identified your child's growth as too fast or too slow to explore possible reasons why.

During the first two years of life and again in puberty, children may not follow

a steady growth pattern. Your child's health care provider can tell you if the changes in the growth rate are expected or if further investigation is needed.

Whether your child's growth is too fast or too slow, avoid restricting food, pressuring your child to eat or force-feeding. Trust that your child knows how much they need to eat. Keep eating a positive experience for your child as this will help with healthy eating and growth for the years ahead.

### For more information

Talk to a health care provider for advice. A registered dietitian (RD) can help with your child's diet and eating pattern. An international board certified lactation consultant (IBCLC) can help with breastfeeding.

For questions about breastfeeding or feeding your child, contact York Region's *Health Connection* at 1-800-361-5653 (TTY 1-866-252-9933) or email [HC@york.ca](mailto:HC@york.ca).

Visit the York Region Nutrition Services website at [www.york.ca/nutrition](http://www.york.ca/nutrition) for practical information on topics such as:

- Breastfeeding
- Feeding babies and children
- Picky eaters
- Weight and growth

You can also read more about the WHO growth charts on the following websites:

- World Health Organization - [www.who.int/childgrowth/en/](http://www.who.int/childgrowth/en/)
- Dietitians of Canada – [www.dietitians.ca/growthcharts](http://www.dietitians.ca/growthcharts)
- Canadian Paediatric Society – [www.cps.ca](http://www.cps.ca) (search “growth charts”)