

Children's Health with Dr. Loretta Britton

Anne Peterson: Hi, I'm Anne Peterson. Welcome to Health Prospective by Blue KC featuring advice from experts on a variety of health topics. It's the place where you'll get the direction you need to make good health choices. Today, Dr. Loretta Britton is here to talk with us about children's health. Dr. Britton is a pediatrician and a Medical Director at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City. Thanks for joining us, Dr. Britton. We could cover so many topics on children's health, but let's narrow it down to your key suggestions for promoting healthy choices and lifestyles for children.

Loretta Britton: It's a pleasure to be here, Anne. I think what we would focus on first of all is providing a loving environment for our children; secondly, a healthy lifestyles focus, and families. Thirdly, prevention. Fourthly, making sure there is a medical home for the children and for our families.

Anne Peterson: Well, let's start with how to make a loving environment for our kids. What do you suggest?

Loretta Britton: A loving environment translates into being nourishing and supportive. Our objective, of course, is to nourish the child both in terms of physical development, and moral development—we certainly want to deal with emotional development. We're trying to make productive young people who will contribute to societies, and that's the family's focus.

Anne Peterson: The next topic is rather challenging for parents. How do you get your kids to eat their fruits and vegetables?

Loretta Britton: Parents bring the food into the household and parents serve the food. And so the key there is, offer fruits and vegetables very early. It's always a part of the natural nutritional guidelines for healthy babies, and it has to continue as such.

Anne Peterson: What are the long-term health benefits when children develop those healthy eating habits early?

Loretta Britton: I think probably prevention. Avoidance of what everyone is concerned about right now, which is obesity. And associated with it are a multitude of health problems. We're seeing problems that we never saw before in children that we used to see solely in adults. And that is elevated blood pressure, problems with self-esteem, anxiety and depression. Obesity also brings on certain concerns about cardio vascular health-related issues as well. Diabetes has been off the charts for our young people, for type two, which used to be considered adult onset diabetes. So we definitely know that what we're looking at is a compromise of our children for their lifestyles, as well as their lifespan. And that's a big concern; it's the very first time that we can probably anticipate that our children won't live as long as their parents.

Anne Peterson: What about exercise? Any advice on how to get kids to spend less time playing their video games and more time being active?

Loretta Britton: Parents must be role models. Children do what the families do, and if the family promotes an active lifestyle, children will be very, very active.

Anne Peterson: We all want our kids to be safe and healthy. So what are some of the basic preventative steps that we can take?

Loretta Britton: Clearly we've all heard of all of the mandates for wearing helmets and seatbelts, but there are none for really making the household safe. Children fall, and children are curious. And so you must do those things that protect them from their healthy curiosity so that they are not inadvertently exposed to poisons and other detrimental products that are found in the home. And we also want to make sure that if they do fall, they also land on a surface that is appropriate to land on. So sharp edges etcetera, may sometimes be looked at differently for a toddler, furniture etcetera, than it would be, for instance, for a young adult in the home.

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Anne Peterson: As a pediatrician, how often should a parent take their child to the doctor?

Loretta Britton: That varies with age; in the first two years of life there may be several visits and these are all timed in with immunization schedules. Secondly, or most importantly, however, is a familiarity with your physician who will assist you in what we call anticipatory guideline monitoring. So that you know what to expect, what you should be looking out for to monitor the wellness of your child for natural and normal growth and developmental milestones being achieved.

Anne Peterson: Well, thanks for joining us and this wonderful advice that you've given us. So to recap, you suggest creating a loving environment for your child, encouraging healthy eating and exercise, practicing prevention and getting to know your child's doctor.

Loretta Britton: That's absolutely right.

Anne Peterson: Thank you, Dr. Britton. Thanks for joining us today for Health Prospective. For more information on children's health, visit the Education Center on [BlueKC.com](#). Be sure to come back next month for tips on another health topic, and register on [BlueKC.com](#) today to put yourself on the path to better health.

