

Paediatric Department

Short height in children

Short height (also called 'short stature') is common but can be of considerable concern to parents and young people.

It is important to not just look at a single height measurement but to consider whether a child is growing slowly and how they compare to their family. You're GP or health visitor might therefore monitor your child's growth and plot it in a growth chart, or in your child's Red Book, over a period of time.

When should I seek medical attention?

You should seek advice from your GP if:

- Your child's height does not increase for a period of time especially if your child is on a lower centile than they used to be in their growth chart (you should expect to see your child grow during a 6 month period)
- You are worried your child is very overweight and is short in height
- You are concerned about other symptoms your child has in addition to short stature, such as tummy pain, headaches, or frequent infections.

What will the GP do?

If your GP or health visitor are worried about your child's growth and height, they may keep track of it for a few months to see if it changes. They also may organise some tests.

Your GP may refer your child to a Paediatrician (doctor specialising in child health). If your child has already seen a paediatric Endocrinologist (doctor specialising in hormones) then your GP will usually refer your child back to them instead.

What should I expect from my paediatric clinic appointment?

You may see a Paediatrician or an endocrine specialist depending on your child's medical history.

At this appointment the following will take place:

- A health professional will conduct a growth and height assessment.
 - You will be asked about your child's medical history. This will include their birth history, growth and health in the first year of life and their general medical health now. It is really helpful for Paediatricians to see how your child has grown overtime, so please remember to bring your child's 'Red Book' or growth charts with you.
 - Parents' heights will be measured to help predict genetic potential for growth.
- ➔ If only one parent is attending the appointment, it is very helpful if you could bring the height (in centimetres) of the other parent, if possible.

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- The Paediatrician will carry out a physical examination and will check for any underlying health conditions and signs of early puberty. They will check breast development in girls, and examine testes in boys. The clinician will take time to reassure you both and answer any questions you may have.
- ➔ It is helpful to discuss this with your child in advance.
- ➔ Children and parents can be anxious about medical examinations. You will be offered a chaperone at your child's appointment. This person is an impartial observer. If you would like a chaperone, it is helpful if you can please let us know on arrival at reception.

Will my child need tests?

Your child's GP may have already arranged some tests but most tests will be organised at the paediatric clinic. We will arrange:

- Blood tests - These are usually done on the day except for under 7 years olds. They will usually need to return for an appointment at a later date, unless considered urgent.
- Wrist x-ray to assess your child's "bone age". The bone age will be helpful to understand your child's predicted height. If the bone age is younger than your child's actual age, this shows they have further growth potential.

You will be able to discuss the results with the Paediatrician, who can then decide if anything further needs to be done.

Will treatment be needed?

The vast majority of children referred with short stature will not require any treatment. Understanding growth patterns in your child and the rest of the family, as well as excluding an underlying condition or nutritional issues, is the most important step. For many children, their growth is monitored over a period of time to check that they 'catch up'.

In rare cases, some children need extra tests and sometimes need growth hormone to help promote growth. This treatment would be through the hospital under the care of a Paediatric endocrinologist and would be discussed with you at the time.

What can I do to help my child?

Short stature can have an impact on your child's mental well-being, particularly in the years leading up to and during puberty. Supporting your child through this is really important.

You can help your child by encouraging them to:

- Talk about their concerns
- Ask their own questions at their medical appointments
- Seek support from their GP or school counsellor if needed.

Trusted sources of further information

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/growth-charts>

<https://childgrowthfoundation.org>



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FROM BIRTH - 18 YEARS