

Failure to Thrive: What You Should Know

What is failure to thrive?

Failure to thrive is used to describe children who weigh a lot less or who are growing much more slowly than most others their age. It is also called weight faltering. Sometimes, children with failure to thrive do not gain enough weight for normal healthy development. A doctor can tell if your child has failure to thrive by looking at weight and height measured over time.

What causes it?

Failure to thrive happens when a child doesn't get enough calories to grow normally. This can be caused by a medical problem, breastfeeding problems, or the child not eating well. Failure to thrive can happen any time during childhood. It is more likely during times of change, like when the child switches from breast milk or formula to table foods, or when there is a change in routine or child care plans.

How is it treated?

Your child's doctor will ask general questions about your child's health and eating habits, examine your child, and look at growth charts. Growth charts map out how your child has grown over time. From this information, he or she can give you a plan to use at home to

help your child get more nutritious calories to gain weight. The treatment plan will include follow-up doctor's visits to check on your child's progress. The doctor can also give you information about programs in your community that can help you.

Most children will improve using the treatment plan. If your child doesn't gain weight, the doctor may do lab tests to see what is keeping your child from growing. A hospital stay is usually not needed.

Once failure to thrive is treated, your child can have normal check-ups. The doctor will keep track of your child's growth and developmental milestones at each visit. Be sure to tell the doctor any time you are worried about your child's progress.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

HealthyChildren.org

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/Glands-Growth-Disorders/Pages/Failure-to-Thrive.aspx>

National Library of Medicine

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000991.htm>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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