Children and families
An introduction to the health visiting service

Gateshead Primary Care Trust
South Tyneside Primary Care Trust
Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust
What is the health visiting service?

The health visiting service is made up of a team who work closely with education, social care and other health care professionals.

Health visitors are experienced qualified nurses with specialist training in child health and development, health promotion and education.

Health visitors are regulated by the Nursing and Midwifery Council and must work according to the Code of Conduct. If you would like to know more about this, please ask your health visitor.

Health visitors are part of the health visiting team and may be assisted by community staff nurses, nursery nurses, support workers and administrative staff. Healthcare students may also become part of the team during their training.

The information in this leaflet will be covered in more depth by your health visitor when he/she visits you after the birth of your baby. More information can also be found in the Birth to Five book and Child Health Record book which you may be given by your midwife or health visitor.
What does my health visiting team do?

The health visiting team is available to everyone regardless of background and focuses on working with children and families to promote health and well being and minimise ill health. We will listen, help, advise and support you until your child transfers to the school nursing service.

Over a period of time, the health visiting team will help you to understand your child’s growth, progress and development. We do this by monitoring your child and providing information, advice, support and access to other services and more specialist help if needed.

We can also help and support you with everyday difficulties such as feeding, sleeping and behaviour or any special difficulties you or your child may have.

The health visiting team is a source of information about health and social care, statutory and voluntary services and other services in your local area such as Children’s Centres and breastfeeding support groups. We can also provide practical and professional information with issues such as maintaining a healthy lifestyle, keeping safe, employment, benefits and childcare.
Frequently asked questions

As you are preparing for the birth of your baby, there may be some questions you would like to ask. These are questions we are asked often and will provide you with some basic advice and information.

Questions you may want to ask before your baby arrives

How should we feed our baby?

Breastfeeding helps protect babies from tummy upsets, allergies, ear and chest infections. Although we encourage you to breastfeed, if you choose to bottle feed your baby, follow the instructions on the infant formula pack carefully.

How do we bath our baby?

Always put cold water in the bath first then test the temperature of the bath water with your wrist or elbow to avoid scalding your baby. You must always stay with your baby at bathtime.

How can we keep our baby safe?

The commonest cause of falls in babies is rolling or sliding off a bed, surface or worktop. Never leave your baby unattended on a raised surface and never shake your baby as this makes your baby’s head move violently which can damage the brain.

Smoke alarms also help to keep you and your family safe and help save lives. Make sure you have smoke alarms fitted in your home, they are in good working order, and are positioned in the correct place.
I’ve heard about ‘cot death’ and ‘sudden infant death syndrome’ but what do we need to do to help prevent this?

Cot death is very rare but the following can help reduce the risk.

- Do not share a bed or sofa with your baby especially if you or your partner smoke, have recently drunk alcohol or have taken drugs or medication that make you sleep more heavily
- Always put your baby to sleep on their back unless there is a medical reason not to
- Use blankets rather than a duvet
- Always place your baby at the foot of the cot to stop them wriggling under the covers
- Make sure your baby doesn’t become too hot or too cold. The ideal room temp is 18C. Always keep your baby's head uncovered
- Keep your baby away from cigarette smoke

I’m worried my partner’s smoking will affect our baby

A smoke free home helps to prevent cot death. Your child is less likely to develop asthma, glue ear, chest infections and coughs. There are lots of services available to help people stop smoking.

If you would like more information about stopping smoking, please ask your health visitor about services available in your area. Alternatively telephone 0800 531 6317 if you live in Gateshead or South Tyneside, or 0800 587 4865 if you live in Sunderland.
Questions you may want to ask about your health after the birth of your baby

I’m worried about getting the baby blues. What should I do?

In the first week after the birth of a baby, some mums develop the ‘baby blues’. This is normal and usually lasts a few days. However if you notice any of the following, please discuss this with your health visitor.

- Feeling of hopelessness or unusually anxious
- Tearfulness
- More irritable than usual or difficulty sleeping
- Loss of interest in the baby
- Worrying obsessively about your baby’s health and safety
- Finding it hard to concentrate

What can I do to keep myself healthy after my baby is born?

Exercise after childbirth can help your body recover and help you to relax. Please discuss this with your health visitor as advice will be different depending on how your baby is delivered. Regular eating is very important so try to make time to eat a healthy, balanced diet. Lack of sleep can also be a problem and most new parents feel tired. There are different ways of coping with tiredness so please discuss this with your health visiting team.
Your health visiting team

Your health visitor will visit you after the birth of your baby, but you may find it useful to make a few notes on the following.

Your health visitor is .................................................................

and can be contacted at .............................................................

on telephone number ..................................................................

Clinics are held on........................................................................

at .................................................................................................

Other useful information:

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If you require further advice:
Please contact your health visitor, GP or local Children's Centre.

NHS South of Tyne and Wear (serving Gateshead Primary Care Trust, South Tyneside Primary Care Trust and Sunderland Teaching Primary Care Trust) is committed to raising the standard of written information for patients, their carers, people who use the NHS and the general public.

For further copies of this leaflet contact the Clinical Modernisation Facilitator Tel: 0191 283 1370

This information can be made available in another format or language on request. Please contact the Communications and PR Team Tel: 0191 529 7118 Email: mopil@sotw.nhs.uk