



Short Stature: What You Need to Know

Short stature is a condition in which your child's height is much lower than expected for their age and sex. In this handout, learn about the causes and symptoms of short stature, and how doctors diagnose and treat the condition.

WHAT IS SHORT STATURE?

Short stature is a condition in which your child's height is much lower than expected for age and sex. This is determined by plotting your child's height on the growth chart. The pediatrician or endocrinologist (hormone doctor) will go over the growth chart with you and your child. The doctor will also consider the rate at which your child is growing. Children who grow at a much slower rate than their peers will eventually end up being shorter than their peers.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF SHORT STATURE?

The most common cause of short stature is familial, meaning that the child is short because the parents are short. Another very common cause is being a **late bloomer**, a condition in which children grow along the lower height percentiles until puberty, which is typically somewhat delayed, and then eventually catch-up.

Other causes of poor growth and/or short stature include genetic conditions, hormonal disorders, suboptimal food intake, gastrointestinal conditions that reduce absorption of food from the gut, inflammatory conditions, conditions affecting the heart or kidneys, and certain medications (including high doses of glucocorticoids such as hydrocortisone, prednisone, prednisolone, and dexamethasone among others).

HOW ARE THE TESTS FOR SHORT STATURE?

The doctor will go over your child's medical and family history and physical examination, and talk with you about which tests are right for your child.

Some common tests include:

- Blood test for hormone levels or genetic disorders
- A hand X-ray to assess your child's growth potential and predicted adult height
- Other tests to check how well the pituitary gland (a small gland in the brain that controls many other glands) is working

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR SHORT STATURE?

Treatment depends on the cause of your child's short stature. Most of the time, short stature does not need treatment. If there is a known cause of short stature such as a hormone disorder, poor nutrition, poor absorption of food from the gut, inflammation, a heart or kidney condition, or a medication that your child is taking, treatment is directed at the cause.

If the doctor thinks your child needs treatment, he will talk with you about options and next steps.