



Children's Health Ireland
at Temple Street

Head Circumference: Parents guide for measuring their child's head

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Introduction:

Assessment of growth is essential. It provides a guide to your child's health, development, nutritional status and response to treatment (Ariza 2005). Growth measurements include height, weight and head circumference. These measurements are recorded into a special chart called a Centile growth chart. Each measurement is plotted on a specific curve in the chart (one for head, one for length and one for weight), to give an indication of the child's development.

It is performed to:

- a). Monitor the growth of a child, particularly those under two years of age (Cox 1993). However, it is still useful to continue to record a child's head circumference, as it may detect any problems that may develop after this period.
- b). Detect abnormal brain/skull growth

Measurement Technique:

1. Wash your hands before commencing the procedure.
2. Place the measuring tape around the child's head (tape used should not be stretchable).
3. The tape should be placed above the ears and midway between the eyebrows and the hairline, around to the widest part of the back of the head (Include the VP Shunt site if applicable).
4. If the child has an unusual shaped head, measure the largest circumference.
5. Read the measurement.
6. Repeat the procedure and take the largest number.



How often should my child's head be measured?

Unless specifically asked to do it more frequently, your child's head should be measured every three months. However, if your child is pre or post VP shunt (ventriculoperitoneal shunt) insertion, their head should be measured twice a week when you go home, until their next appointment. You should get a letter for your GP and Public health nurse on discharge, explaining to them how often to measure your child's head. Ask your consultant, at your appointment, how often to continue measuring your child's head.

Documentation:

The child's head circumference must be documented. You can either write it down in a notebook or write it in your child's growth chart. It should be plotted on the relevant grid of the growth chart with a well defined dot, and not a cross and also written into the recording box by your public health nurse. The growth curve should be traced with a line leaving the dots visible.

Reporting findings:

The child's doctor should be informed if:

- The child's head circumference measurement indicates excessive or limited growth
- Their head is an abnormal shape or size
- The head circumference has increased by two boxes on the growth chart from their last head measurement reading (if done frequently).

Please contact the Neurosurgical Nurse Co-ordinator on (01) 8921753 or Spina Bifida nurse (01) 88921768 if you have concerns re head measurements or the main hospital (01) 8784200 and bleep 114 to speak to the Neurosurgical Registrar.