



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Head circumference

URL of this page: [//medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002379.htm](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002379.htm)

# Head circumference

Head circumference is a measurement of a child's head around its largest area. It measures the distance from above the eyebrows and ears and around the back of the head.

## Information

During routine checkups, the distance is measured in centimeters or inches and compared with:

- Past measurements of a child's head circumference.
- Normal ranges for a child's sex and age (weeks, months), based on values that experts have obtained for normal growth rates of infants' and children's heads.

Measurement of the head circumference is an important part of routine well-baby care. During the well-baby exam, a change from the expected normal head growth may alert the health care provider of a possible problem.

For example, a head that is larger than normal or that is increasing in size faster than normal may be a sign of several problems, including water on the brain (hydrocephalus).

A very small head size (called microcephaly) or very slow growth rate may be a sign that the brain is not developing properly.

## Alternative Names

Occipital-frontal circumference

## References

Ball JW, Dains JE, Flynn JA, Solomon BS, Stewart RW. Growth and nutrition. In: Ball JW, Dains JE, Flynn JA, Solomon BS, Stewart RW, eds. *Siedel's Guide to Physical Examination*. 10th ed. St Louis, MO: Elsevier; 2023:chap 8.

Bamba V, Kelly A. Assessment of growth. In: Kliegman RM, St. Geme JW, Blum NJ, Shah SS, Tasker RC, Wilson KM, eds. *Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics*. 21st ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2020:chap 27.

Riddell A. Children and adolescents. In: Glynn M, Drake WM, eds. *Hutchison's Clinical Methods*. 25th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2023:chap 6.

# Review Date 1/24/2023

Updated by: Neil K. Kaneshiro, MD, MHA, Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, University of Washington School of Medicine, Seattle, WA. Also reviewed by David C. Dugdale, MD, Medical Director, Brenda Conaway, Editorial Director, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.

Learn how to cite this page



Health Content  
Provider  
06/01/2028

A.D.A.M., Inc. is accredited by [URAC](http://www.urac.org), for Health Content Provider ([www.urac.org](http://www.urac.org)). URAC's [accreditation program](#) is an independent audit to verify that A.D.A.M. follows rigorous standards of quality and accountability. A.D.A.M. is among the first to achieve this important distinction for online health information and services. Learn more about A.D.A.M.'s [editorial policy](#), [editorial process](#), and [privacy policy](#).

The information provided herein should not be used during any medical emergency or for the diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. A licensed medical professional should be consulted for diagnosis and treatment of any and all medical conditions. Links to other sites are provided for information only – they do not constitute endorsements of those other sites. No warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied, is made as to the accuracy, reliability, timeliness, or correctness of any translations made by a third-party service of the information provided herein into any other language. © 1997-2025 A.D.A.M., a business unit of Ebix, Inc. Any duplication or distribution of the information contained herein is strictly prohibited.

