How do I check my pulse?

To take your child's pulse, you will need a watch with a minute hand, or a stopwatch with the minutes and seconds displayed (this is usually easier to use). Find a quiet place where your child can sit or lie comfortably.

If your child has just been active (running, jumping, crying, etc.), wait at least 5 minutes to allow the heart time to slow down and return to a normal beat.

To feel a pulse, you press two fingers — your index ("pointer") and middle fingers — onto a major artery in the body. Press gently. Never press with your thumb, as it has a pulse all its own and can throw off a reading. When you've located the pulse, you will feel a throbbing sensation.

There are several areas on the body to read a pulse, but in kids these are generally the easiest places:

- **On the neck (carotid artery pulse).** The carotid artery runs along either side of the throat (windpipe). Run your fingers about halfway down the neck and press gently to the left or right side of the windpipe (carefully avoiding the Adam's apple in teen boys). Press gently. You should feel the pulse. If not, try again or on the other side.
- **On the wrist (radial pulse).** This is the spot where most adults have their pulse taken. It can work well in kids, too. To find the right spot, place a finger at the base of your child's thumb and slide it straight down to the wrist. On the wrist, press gently to feel for the pulse. This works best if your child's hand is lying flat or bent slightly backward.
- **In the armpit (axillary pulse).** Press your fingertips into the armpit, feeling around for the arm bone. When you feel the arm bone beneath your fingers, you should also feel the pulse. This method works well for infants.
- **In the crease of the elbow (brachial pulse).** This location works best for infants. Place your infant on his or her back with one arm flat along the baby's side (elbow crease facing up). In the crease of the elbow, gently place your fingers on the inside of the arm (the pinky side). Feel around for a pulse.

Once you've located the pulse (feeling a "throbbing" or "beating" sensation on your fingers), begin counting the beats within a 30-second timeframe. After 30 seconds, stop. Take the number of beats (for example, 45 beats in a 30-second period) and double it. So:

45 x 2 = 90 beats per minute. The heart rate for your child would be 90, which is within the normal range for most kids. (This is just an example; your child's heart rate may be different.)