

# Healthy You

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Energy?



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 **Lehigh Valley  
Health Network**

# When a Child Falls

## Here's your next best step

**Y**our child falls off her bicycle. She's bruised and limping, but says she'll be OK. Should you take her to the hospital now or wait to see how she's feeling tomorrow?

To answer the question, find out more about the fall, says Lehigh Valley Health Network pediatrician Amil Qureshi, MD. "If it was serious—like down a flight of stairs—always go to the nearest emergency room," he says. "If it was minor, look for warning signs of a serious injury."

Here's what could happen when a child falls, and what you should look for to determine if a trip to a place like the health network's Children's ER is necessary.

**Concussion**—Young children commonly hit their head because they're not strong enough to break their fall, and their heads are large in proportion to their bodies. A trip to the ER is recommended for children of all ages who show signs of a serious head injury: bad headache, confusion, vomiting, dizziness or loss of consciousness.

**Fracture**—A broken bone can be serious when it occurs on a growth plate, the area of a bone where growth occurs. Untreated, it may cause a bone to grow crooked or abnormally short. If your child can't bear weight or move the affected area, go to the ER. Otherwise, rest, ice, elevate and wrap the area with a bandage. If there's no improvement, see a doctor.

**Sprain**—A sprain is damage to the ligaments that hold bones together. "Sprains are uncommon in children," says health network pediatric emergency physician Christy Salvaggio, MD. "Girls younger than 13 and boys younger than 15 are more likely to fracture a growth plate than sprain a ligament."

**Dislocation**—A dislocation is the separation of two bones where they meet at a joint. A common partial dislocation in children is nursemaid's elbow, the dislocation of the forearm bone from the elbow joint. It often occurs when a child is held by the hands and playfully swung in a circle or yanked quickly. Children with nursemaid's elbow will refuse to move their arm. If you suspect it, go to an ER right away.

**Neck injury**—If a child can't move his arms or legs, he may have a spinal cord injury. If this occurs, call 9-1-1 immediately and don't move the child. It may cause additional damage.

**Next Step:** Learn about Lehigh Valley Health Network's Children's ER. Visit [lvhn.org/healthyyou](http://lvhn.org/healthyyou) or call 610-402-CARE.





**‘Mommy, it hurts’—**

That’s what your child may say after a fall, demonstrated here by Gabby (left) and her mom, Kim Gormas of Emmaus.

## When Is a Cough Serious?

**If it won’t go away, call your doctor**

**It’s cold-weather season**, and nobody gets away without an occasional cough. But when is it more than just a hard-to-shake cold?

“That occasional cough is normal and helpful,” says family medicine physician Mark Wendling, MD, with Lehigh Valley Health Network. “It helps clear foreign substances and secretions from your lungs and prevents infection.”

**If it lasts only a few days or weeks**, it’s common and could be caused by allergies, a cold or other lung infection, or croup (in children). To ease that cough:

**Use cough drops or hard candies.** They may ease a dry cough and soothe an irritated throat. Never give these to a child under age 3 because they can cause choking.

**Use a vaporizer** or take a hot, steamy shower to moisten the air.

**Drink fluids** to thin the mucus in your throat. Warm liquids like broth or tea can have a soothing effect.

**Take an expectorant (cough syrup)** that can help make mucus easier to cough up. Do not give expectorants to children.

**If a cough lasts longer than a few weeks**, there may be an underlying problem or more serious infection. “Watch for symptoms like wheezing, shortness of breath or fever over 100.5, particularly lasting more than 48 hours,” Wendling says. That could signal a more serious lung infection, lung condition such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema or lung cancer.

**What can you do?** If you have wheezing or shortness of breath—or if your cough gets worse when you lie down—call your doctor. She will do a physical exam and may ask for diagnostic testing (such as a chest X-ray, CT scan or an endoscopy to examine nasal passages, bronchial tubes or the esophagus) to determine the cause of your cough. That will help diagnose what’s causing it, and help you and your doctor determine the best treatment.

**Next Step:** *Time to take a sick day? Get the answer at [lvhn.org/healthyyou](http://lvhn.org/healthyyou) or call 610-402-CARE.*