



Empowering Children. Supporting Families. Building Brighter Futures.

Resource 052 | Growth and nutrition

Growth faltering

What it means

Growth faltering means a child's growth or weight gain is not following an appropriate pattern over time. It is a finding that needs explanation, not a diagnosis of poor caregiving. A naturally small child with steady growth is different from a child whose growth is slowing or whose nutritional needs are unmet. [1]

Causes and risk factors

Possible causes include insufficient intake, feeding or swallowing difficulties, food access barriers, problems absorbing nutrients, increased energy needs from illness, or other medical conditions. Several factors can coexist. The child's birth history, growth pattern, and family context are important. [1,2]

General family education. A concern deserves assessment, but this guide does not diagnose a child or prescribe treatment.



Signs and everyday impact

Concerns may include slowing weight gain, crossing growth trajectories, poor intake, unusually lengthy meals, fatigue, or delayed development. One measurement alone can be misleading. Growth should be interpreted using suitable charts and reliable repeated measurements, including relevant prematurity adjustment. [1,2]

Assessment and diagnosis

A clinician reviews growth over time, diet, feeding skills, illness symptoms, development, and social circumstances. A dietitian or feeding team may assess intake and mealtime needs. Laboratory tests and imaging are targeted to findings rather than automatically ordered for every child with slow gain. [1,2]

Treatment and therapy

Care addresses the cause and ensures adequate, safe nutrition through an individualized plan. It may include feeding support, changes to energy or nutrient intake, treatment of illness, and help accessing food or services. Severe undernutrition or medical instability may need hospital care. Follow-up checks both growth and whether the plan is practical for the family. [1,2,3]

Support at home

Follow the agreed feeding and monitoring plan and bring useful records rather than weighing repeatedly without guidance. Share barriers honestly, including cost, availability, pain, and distress. Do not dilute formula, force feeds, or use concentrated nutrition changes without appropriate advice.

When to seek help

Dehydration, marked lethargy, breathing difficulty, rapid weight loss, persistent vomiting, or inability to maintain intake needs urgent assessment.

Questions for your care team

- Is the growth pattern truly concerning for this child?
- Which intake, feeding, medical, or access factors are involved?
- When will growth and the treatment plan be reviewed?



Podcast preparation

Use this outline to develop a later podcast script.

Suggested opening

Welcome to Mariel Early Intervention. Today we discuss growth faltering. Growth faltering means a child's growth or weight gain is not following an appropriate pattern over time. This is general education; each child needs individualized care.

Opening: Define the topic and its developmental context.

Understanding: Explain causes and signs without inviting self-diagnosis.

Assessment: Describe evaluation and distinguish screening from diagnosis.

Support: Discuss treatment, therapy, and practical family supports.

Closing: Explain urgent signs and one clear next step.

Misconception to address: Growth faltering should prompt support and investigation, not blame.

Before recording: update clinical references and local service details, arrange clinical review, and use fully consented or fictional examples.

Terms in plain language

- Growth trajectory: the pattern of growth over time.
- Intake: food and fluid consumed.
- Energy needs: the calories required for growth and health.

Sources and further reading

Sources accessed 3 October 2026. Numbered references support the clinical overview. Treatment availability and referral routes vary by country.

[1] Faltering Weight in Children: Parent FAQs

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/Glands-Growth-Disorders/Pages/faltering-weight-in-children-parent-faqs.aspx>

[2] AAP Releases New Guidance on Faltering Weight in Children

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/news/Pages/aap-issues-new-guidance-on-faltering-weight-in-children.aspx>

[3] Pediatric Feeding and Swallowing

<https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/pediatric-feeding-and-swallowing/>