The long and short of your child

CHENNAI: A child's weight and height are always a cause for concern among parents, who often compare their child with the others in the same age group. But not all differences are signs of abnormality, reassure doctors. So when is his thin frame or her relatively short height a factor to worry about?

Dr Naresh Shanmogam, paediatric hepatologist, Global Hospitals, says that some term babies tend to be small, due to factors related to the mother during pregnancy. "These could be issues like hypertension, but such children usually catch up with age," he says.

He adds that the growth chart prescribed by the World Health Organisation can be a guiding tool to ascertain the child's growth. He says, "Where the child stands in the centile as given in the growth chart is an indicator for any abnormality."

Malnourishment for long has been the biggest reason for the child's slowed growth, but Dr Naresh says that that's not the case anymore. "We need to look at any kind of syndromes that the child has been born with. Growth hormone issues also contribute to the problem," he says.

When being chubby is not being healthy

Dr Subha Kirthikeyan, paediatrician-nephrologist, Motherhood, says that as against parent's common notion, a chubby child is not always healthy. "I keep telling parents of children you see in TV ads. They must understand that the child which is gaining weight at a considerable pace in the first one year, often slows down in the next two years. But he or she may be 50 centimetres at 2 years, which is absolutely fine. Children have their own mind and cannot be force fed. If a 10-month-old baby eats two tills, that doesn't mean the child will eat more or at least the same quantity when he or she is one-and-a-half years old. Similarly, don't compare their eating habits to that of adults. While we crave, they eat only when they are hungry," she says.

She adds that as long as the child is active and isn't falling seriously ill every month, parents can be reassured that their child is doing good. "Every child is bound to have a cold and cough frequently."

But if they are having frequent episodes of diarrhoeal stools, it needs to be investigated. One must also watch out for malabsorption. In such a case, children tend to fall ill persistently and appear dull," she points out.

What is a growth chart?

A growth chart is a tool used to assess whether your baby is growing and developing as he or she should be. Boys and girls have separate growth charts, because boys are on average slightly heavier and taller than girls, and their growth patterns are different.