



Ask Dr. Tanya

Interview by Cari Jackson

A new book from the American Academy of Pediatrics is designed to take a lot of the worry out of parenting

Pediatrician and a clinical instructor, featured guest on the *Today Show*, and serving on several editorial boards (including *Healthy Children's*), Tanya Remer Altmann, M.D., FAAP, is also the mother of two young children. Making full use of her boys' naptimes, her weekends and her days away from seeing patients at the office, she squeezed just about everything you need to know about your baby or toddler into her new book, *Mommy Calls: Dr. Tanya Answers parents' Top 101 Questions About Babies and Toddlers*. An information powerhouse, *Mommy Calls* covers everything from when you can take your newborn out into the world to how to get your walking, talking toddler to sleep through the night. In the spirit of the book's Q and A format, we managed to catch her during another naptime to ask a few questions before this fact-filled and fun parenting resource hits the shelves in October.

Healthy Children: Why did you call it *Mommy Calls*? Is it because you're a mommy or because it's usually a mom who makes the call to the doctor?

Dr. Tanya Remer Altmann: The name, *Mommy Calls*, came from my residency at UCLA. One of our responsibilities was to carry the "mommy calls" pager and return the "mommy calls" as they came in. Calls came from moms, dads, grandparents and other caregivers, but we called them

“mommy calls.” I found that many of the calls and concerns that we addressed were the same day after day and night after night. So I started keeping a list of the questions, along with answers, and it eventually became the inspiration for this book.

HC: You really cover a lot of ground in this very portable book. How did you manage it?

TRA: I tried to boil down the many important questions from parents and caregivers into the 101 most common. Pediatricians and parents across the country weighed in before the list was finalized. Just as I do when parents ask me a question over the phone or in the office, I first educate them on the topic and then let them know if there are any signs that they need to watch for and when they should call back. A bit of personal experience and humor helps as well.

HC: What might question #102 be?

TRA: That’s a good question. [laughs]

HC: Or did you cover everything? [laughs]

TRA: Well, no book can cover absolutely everything! I could have answered 1,001 questions, but it wouldn’t be easy for parents to carry around in their baby bag. There are many excellent parenting books available, but I found that parents would call and say, “I have 10 books on my bookshelf, but I still can’t figure out why my kid’s poop is green and if I should be worried.” I tried to be very practical and specific. There is a place for all types of parenting books; but at 3 a.m. when your toddler throws up, you don’t want to read a whole chapter on stomach issues, you just want to look in one place, find out what you can do to help your child’s symptoms and if you really need to worry or call your pediatrician.

HC: What worries parents most that is least worth the worry?

TRA: Poop! Definitely Poop! Parents often excessively worry about their child’s poop. It’s too much, not enough, or the “wrong” color. They even bring it in baggies for me to look at. The truth is that normal poop can vary in its consistency and frequency and can be almost any color of the rainbow except for white, red or black. So try and relax. After all, it’s poop.

HC: How can parents make your job easier, so that you can give even better care to their kids?

TRA: Parents really know their child best and they provide the most valuable information when it comes to caring for their child in my office or over the phone. Often the more information that parents come in with regarding the child’s symptoms such as fever or vomiting and how the illness affects the child’s usual behavior — how they are eating, sleeping and acting — can help us figure out what is going on.

HC: Trips to the doctor’s office are stressful these days — some doctors are overbooked, and waits can be long. What can parents do to improve their trip to the pediatrician?

TRA: Try to plan ahead as much as possible. Schedule your well-child check-ups one or two months ahead of time if possible. Obviously many doctors’ visits can’t be planned ahead of time — especially when children are sick. But you may be able to ask for a first morning appointment or a time when the wait may not be as long. Understand that there are often emergencies during the day and that can put us behind schedule.

Don’t forget to prepare your child for the visit. Role-play at home and pretend to listen to his heart and look in his ears. Offer praise and encouragement. Making it a fun experience will be easier on everyone involved.

Also, whenever you go anywhere with your little ones bring things to keep them entertained such as books or toys. A drink and snack are also a good idea in case you’re out longer than expected. Make sure you have enough diapers, extra clothes and anything else you might need to care for your child. And if you have too much to carry, make a second bag of extra supplies to leave in your car.

HC: Is it safe to say that being a mom really gave you extra insight — or at least more opportunity to connect with your reader?

TRA: Definitely! I have learned so much being a parent. I often joke that now I know everything there is to know about raising children up to age 3 1/2!

Parents in my practice really appreciate the practical knowledge and personal experience I share with them. I’ve juggled nursing and pumping while working and traveling. So, I have a lot of advice to provide moms who come in and ask about the practical aspect of breastfeeding and pumping. Even things like bathing, feeding or helping your infant learn to sleep through the night are easier to guide parents through after you’ve experienced it yourself. Many of my practical parenting tips I’ve included in *Mommy Calls*.

HC: So, rule of thumb, when do you call a pediatrician?

TRA: If there’s something that concerns you or you’re going to stay up at night worrying, you should definitely call, even if it’s 4 am! As a pediatrician, I expect to get calls, and some nights there are more than others. A good rule of thumb with children is that if they’re not eating or sleeping well, something may be bothering them. ●

Mommy Calls is available in bookstores nationwide and at www.aap.org/bookstore.

