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FROM **Parenting** MAGAZINE

Getting the Right Diagnosis

How to help your doctor out and make sure your child gets an accurate diagnosis

By Celeste Perron

Up to 20 percent of medical diagnoses are incorrect. What's more, says Jerome Groopman, M.D., a Harvard Medical School professor and the author of *How Doctors Think*, pediatricians may be especially likely to make a mistake, in part because their young patients often can't describe their symptoms well. To help your doctor out and make sure your child gets an accurate diagnosis:

- 1. Beware of the words "There's a lot of this going around."** Doctors are influenced by their recent experiences, so if yours sees three kids with stomach viruses and then examines your vomiting daughter, he may overlook the possibility that something other than a virus is to blame.
- 2. Ask, "What else could it be?"** It's easy for a doctor to get locked into a diagnosis based on a quick assessment of symptoms. Asking this question forces your doctor to consider other explanations. You can also ask, "Could two things be going on at once?" and "Are there any findings (from the physical exam, blood tests, x rays, etc.) that don't add up?"
- 3. Take a list of your child's symptoms.** Detailed notes of how your child's been feeling will help the doctor zero in on the cause. But don't rely solely on them. "It's sometimes hard for parents to identify which symptoms are most important, and that only comes up in an open dialogue," says Dr. Groopman. "A list is just a starting point."

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