

for today's teens: a message from your pediatrician



Now that you are getting older, you have different health needs than you did when you were younger. However, your pediatrician is still there to help you stay healthy.

Just ask

Beginning when you are about 11 or 12 years old, your pediatrician might suggest that you spend some time alone with him or her during your health care visits. Why? While it's always important to talk with parents about some personal things in your life, it can be really hard. But you can always ask your pediatrician about personal stuff. They've heard it all! Plus, your pediatrician cares about your health and wants to help you in any way.

Talking with your pediatrician is a great way to get the answers about how your body works, how to take care of yourself, how to handle your emotions, how to stay healthy, and how to talk about these things with your parents.

Remember, your pediatrician will keep most of what you talk about private! This is called *confidentiality*. There may be exceptions, like if your life or someone else's life is in danger. And in some states the law may require pediatricians to share certain information. At your next visit feel free to ask your pediatrician about what's confidential.

Take charge!

Some kids your age only see their pediatrician when they are sick or hurt. But staying healthy means more than just seeing a doctor when something is wrong. You're getting old enough to start taking charge of your own health. This means preventing problems before they start.

So, see your pediatrician once a year, just to make sure everything is OK.

Of course, you should also see your pediatrician when you are sick or hurt.

Important stuff

Hopefully you feel comfortable enough with your pediatrician to ask anything, even stuff that's a little embarrassing. But in case you're wondering what kinds of things pediatricians can help you with, check out the following list:

• Sports or school physicals

If you play sports, you probably need to get a physical before you can play. Some kids need a physical before the start of a new school year. This is a great time to talk with your pediatrician about your health and how to avoid injuries and stay healthy and fit.

• Treatment of illnesses or injuries

Have you been sick lately? Did you get hurt recently? These are important things to tell your pediatrician about, even if you think they're no big deal. Let your pediatrician know about any pain you have or anything that feels different.

• Growth and development

Your body is changing fast and you might want to talk about what's going on. Don't know where to start? You may want to ask

—Will I be as tall as my parents?

—What can I do about these pimples?

—Am I fat?

—Why are my breasts uneven? (Girls—The answer is often normal variation.)

—Why are my pajamas wet in the morning? (Guys—The answer is almost always nocturnal emission or "wet dream.")

• Personal and/or family problems

Having a hard time dealing with your friends or family? Feel like your parents just don't understand you? Maybe you're being teased at school, feeling pressure from some friends, or being bullied. All of these things can be pretty hard to deal with. If you don't know where to turn, remember that your pediatrician is there to help. Just ask.

• School problems

You may worry about your grades and your future. Maybe you're finding it hard to keep up with school, a job, sports, or other activities. Your pediatrician may be able to help you through this busy time of your life.

• Alcohol and drug use

You probably know kids who are using cigarettes, alcohol, or other drugs. Maybe you've been tempted to try these things too. But don't forget—what's right for them might not always be right for you.

Becoming an adult means more than just getting taller. It also means you have to make decisions about your life, not letting someone else make them for you. Your pediatrician can explain how smoking, drinking, or taking other drugs can affect you and why it's smart to stay away from them.

• Sex

During visits with your pediatrician, you'll have a chance to ask questions about dating, sex, and other personal stuff. It's important to make the right choices about sex now. The wrong choice could affect the rest of your life. The good news is, whatever you and your pediatrician talk about is private so go ahead and ask about sex, how to protect yourself against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy, or whatever else you want to know about.

- **Conflicts with parents**

Having any problems at home? Does it sometimes seem like no one understands you or respects your ideas? You're not alone. If you have a problem that your parents may not understand, talk with your pediatrician. Sometimes an outside person can give a better view of these difficult situations. Your pediatrician might also have some ideas on how to get through to your parents.

- **Referrals to other doctors for special health needs**

You may have a medical problem that will require you to see a different doctor or specialist. In that case, your pediatrician can refer you to another doctor who can help you. But even though you may need to see a specialist, your pediatrician still cares about your health and wants to see you for regular checkups or illnesses.

What you can do to stay healthy

To get a head start on taking charge of your own health, use the following list to keep yourself healthy:

- Eat right and get plenty of sleep (most teens need 9–10 hours a night).
- Know how to handle minor injuries like cuts and bruises, as well as minor illnesses like colds.
- Know how to get medical help for things like vomiting, headache, high fever, earache, sore throat, diarrhea, or stomach pain.
- Ask for help if you have sleep problems, sadness, family stress, school problems, problems with alcohol or other drugs, or trouble getting along with friends, family, or teachers.
- Don't use alcohol, cigarettes, smokeless tobacco (chew), and other drugs.
- Delay having sex or use protection if you choose to have sex.
- Exercise regularly.
- Always wear your seat belt when you are in a car or truck.

As you become an adult, you'll face many challenges. With help from your pediatrician, you'll learn how to make the right decisions that will help you grow up healthy.

The persons whose photographs are depicted in this publication are professional models. They have no relation to the issues discussed. Any characters they are portraying are fictional.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

