

Adolescence



Between the ages of 11 and 21, your adolescent will change in many ways. He will grow physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially. As he goes through this period, he will begin to make his own choices about many things, such as studying, working, friends and family, sports, driving, sex, drinking, and smoking. It will be important for you to help him learn how to make wise choices.

Adolescents, Parents, and Health Professionals: Partners for Health

Until now, you've been responsible for your child's health. You established relationships with health care providers and took him to doctor's appointments. Now that he is an adolescent, he needs to be more involved in his own health care. Each of you brings something special to his health care. Your adolescent is the one experiencing physical and emotional changes. The health professional knows about health care and development. And you have guided your child's health and development throughout his life.

Health Professional Visits During Adolescence

Your health professional will want to see your adolescent for regular checkups once a year between the ages of 11 and 21. You can use annual school, sports, or camp physicals for these visits. These visits are important. They are a time for you to ask questions or discuss concerns. And they are a time when your adolescent can talk privately and confidentially with the health professional. At these visits, your adolescent will get a physical exam and screening tests, such as

those for hearing, vision, blood pressure, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted diseases (if she is sexually active).

Also, she may get one or more of the following immunizations:

- Hepatitis B
- Diphtheria, tetanus (Td)
- Measles, mumps, rubella (MMR)
- Varicella (Var) or chicken pox
- Hepatitis A (in selected areas)
- Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

Social Development

Social development is your adolescent's growth in confidence, independence, and positive feelings about herself. It is also the way she interacts with others.

Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional

- Concerns your adolescent may have in making or keeping friends.
- Ways to help your adolescent cope with her anger and resolve conflicts without violence.
- Signs that she is feeling sad or nervous, or that "things are just not going right."

Safety

Adolescence is a time when young people experiment with new behaviors. Trying new things helps them develop



good judgment. It helps them learn to respect limits. But sometimes they make mistakes or misjudge a situation. So it's important to talk about ways to stay safe. Make sure your adolescent has the names and phone numbers of people to call in case of emergency. When your adolescent goes out, ask where he is going, with whom, and when he will be back. Discuss his ideas for settling conflicts without violence. Remove guns from the home or keep them unloaded and locked up. Talk together about the dangers of drugs, tobacco, alcohol, and risky sexual activity. Agree on rules for when and where he can use the car. Make an agreement about who can ride with him.

Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional

- A plan for handling emergencies or injuries.
- Community alcohol, tobacco, and other drug prevention and treatment programs.
- Issues related to sexuality.

Physical Activity

The best activities are those your adolescent enjoys. He may like activities such as walking, running, swimming, or biking. These activities can provide opportunities to socialize. They will also improve your adolescent's overall health, self-esteem, and well-being.



Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional

- Physical activities, athletic conditioning, or weight training for your adolescent.
- Questions about weight gain or loss.
- Any special health care concerns related to physical activity.

Eating

An adolescent's rapidly growing body needs more energy and nutrients than before. Eating right is essential for growth and development. It also helps prevent health problems. Your adolescent will eat away from home more often. She will begin to make her own choices about what she eats and drinks. It's a good time to teach her the importance of healthy eating and of choosing nutritious foods on her own.

Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional

- Ways to help your adolescent safely control her weight.
- Possible food allergies.
- Alternative foods or meal plans, such as vegetarian or vegan diets.

Oral Health

Good oral health requires regular visits with the dentist. Your dentist will recommend how often to visit.

Things to Discuss with Your Dentist or Health Professional

- Proper techniques for flossing and brushing.
- Whether your adolescent might need braces.
- Whether your adolescent should get dental sealants. A sealant is a thin plastic coating that covers the molars, the big teeth used for chewing. Sealants keep food and bacteria from getting trapped in the molars where they cause decay.
- Whether the water in your community is fluoridated. Water fluoridation is a safe and effective way to greatly reduce the risk of cavities and tooth decay.

Education

During these years, your adolescent will go from middle/junior high school to high school and then into the adult world. At each stage, she will have much greater independence. School pressures will require her to become more organized and efficient. Your adolescent is more likely to enjoy learning and to do well in school if you show that you believe education is important. Your praise will help her feel good about herself.

Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional

- Problems with vision, hearing, or other health issues that interfere with learning.
- Behaviors that cause problems at school.
- Concerns about your adolescent's school progress.
- Getting special educational services or adaptive equipment if your adolescent has special needs.

You, your adolescent, and the health care provider form a partnership that will help your child have a happy healthy adolescence.

Adapted, with permission, from National Center for Maternal and Child Health and Georgetown University. 2001. Bright Futures Family Tip Sheets: Adolescence. Available at www.brightfutures.org
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A Healthy Roads Media project
www.healthyroadsmedia.org

Adolescence – English (Last reviewed 9/2006)