

For Today's Teens:

A Message From Your Pediatrician



Your pediatrician may have cared for you since you were a small child. As you continue to grow and change, you will have new health needs. Even though you are becoming an adult, your pediatrician can still help you stay healthy.

When you are 11 or 12 years old, most pediatricians will speak with you and your parent or guardian at your checkup and suggest that you spend some time alone with him or her during future health care visits. What you talk about during these visits will remain confidential. This way you will begin to learn how to take care of your own health.

Growing up is often confusing. Your body is changing and you may feel differently than you did a few years ago. The changes you feel now may leave you wondering what's happening to your mind and body. You may have questions about these changes and how you should take care of yourself. Your pediatrician can answer questions about the following:

- eating right
- your height and weight
- exercise and sports
- acne
- dating
- body changes
- school performance
- alcohol and other drugs
- other concerns you may have

Why do teens need a pediatrician?

Some teenagers only visit their pediatrician when they are sick or hurt, but staying healthy means more than just seeing a doctor when something is wrong. As you become an adult, you need to take charge of your own health. This means preventing problems before they start. A first step might be to see your pediatrician once a year, just to make sure everything is OK and any problems are prevented from becoming serious.

You should also see your pediatrician when you are sick or concerned about what is happening to your body. Most likely, your concerns are normal. Growing up may also trigger changes in how you think and feel. You may feel sad, angry, or nervous at times. You should feel free to talk to your pediatrician about these things. After all, these emotions are a part of being healthy too.

What health services do pediatricians offer?

The following is a partial list of different things that you can talk about with your pediatrician:

Sports or school physicals:

Many schools ask students to get a physical before joining a team sport. It's important for you to talk about your health with your pediatrician before you participate in any sport. Your pediatrician can help you avoid injuries and stay healthy and fit.

Treatment of illnesses or injuries:

It is important for you to tell your pediatrician about any illnesses or injuries you have. Let your pediatrician know about pain you have or changes in the way you feel, even if you think they aren't serious. This is the only way your pediatrician can help you stay healthy.

A word about...privacy

Talking about personal things with your family and friends can sometimes be difficult. When you feel uncomfortable talking about certain things with your parents, you can always ask your pediatrician. Getting answers about how your body works, how you can take care of yourself, how to handle your emotions, and how to stay healthy, will help you make the right decisions about your health.

Your pediatrician will respect you as a patient. Because the pediatrician is your doctor, he or she will keep your discussions private whenever possible. However, your parents are obviously very concerned about your health and well-being, and your pediatrician will want to keep them informed of extreme situations; for example, if your life, or someone else's, is in danger. In most cases though, the information you share with your pediatrician will stay between you and your pediatrician.

Growth and development:

Your body is probably changing fast and you might want to talk to your pediatrician about what to expect as you grow. For example, you may be wondering about the following:

- Will you be as tall as your parents?
- Is your sexual development normal?
- Will your acne clear up?
- Will your body fill out more?
- Should you be worried about your weight?

These are all things you can discuss openly and freely with your pediatrician. Just ask.

Personal and/or family problems:

Sometimes you might have a hard time dealing with problems with friends or family. Feeling like your parents don't understand you, losing a best friend, getting teased at school, pressure from friends- all these things can get the best of you once in a while. If you don't know where to turn, remember that your pediatrician is there to help.

School problems:

As a student, you may worry sometimes about your grades and your future. No matter what you try, it may be hard to keep up with school, a job, sports, or other activities. Maybe you find it difficult to get along with others at school or to concentrate on your studies. Your pediatrician may be able to help you through this busy time of your life.

Alcohol and drug use:

You may be tempted to take risks as you make new friends. You may also get a lot of pressure from your friends. Remember, what's right for them might not always be right for you. Becoming an adult means more than just physical growth. It also means determining what is right for you. This is especially important since many people you know may be using cigarettes, alcohol, or other drugs. Instead of going along with the crowd, you need to decide what is the best choice for you. Your pediatrician can explain how smoking, drinking, or taking other drugs can affect you.

Sexual relationships:

During visits with your pediatrician, you'll have a chance to ask questions about dating, sexual activity, and infections. Your pediatrician also can talk to you confidentially about postponing sex and how to protect yourself against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and pregnancy. It's important to make smart choices about sex now. The wrong choice could affect the rest of your life.

Conflicts with parents:

At times, it might be hard to get along with your family and this could lead to problems at home. Maybe it seems 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.

Referrals to other doctors for special health needs:

You may have a medical problem that will require you to see another doctor or specialist. In that case, your pediatrician can refer you to another doctor who can take care of your needs. A referral may involve an ophthalmologist (eye doctor) for vision, a psychologist or psychiatrist for stress or depression, or other doctors that handle specific medical needs. Even though you may need to see a specialist for a special problem, you should continue to see your pediatrician for regular checkups or illnesses. After all, he or she is still your doctor and will want to keep up with your general needs.

Educational brochures, magazines, or videos on health topics:

In addition to talking about your health with your pediatrician, you also may be able to learn more about how to take better care of yourself by reading brochures or by watching videos. The American Academy of Pediatrics offers free material covering health topics that might interest you, such as acne, sports and fitness, sexuality, substance abuse, eating disorders, and more. Ask your pediatrician for more information.

What you can do to stay healthy

Use the following list to take care of yourself and stay healthy:

- **Eat right and get plenty of sleep.**
- **Know how to handle minor injuries**, such as cuts and bruises, as well as minor illnesses like colds.
- **Know how to seek medical attention** for problems such as vomiting, headache, high fever, earache, sore throat, diarrhea, or abdominal pain.
- **Take care of your mental health** and ask for help if you have sleep problems, sadness, family stress, school problems, problems with alcohol or other drugs, or trouble relating to friends, family, or teachers.
- **Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, smokeless tobacco (chew), and other drugs.**
- **Delay having sexual relations** or use protection if you choose to have sex.
- **Exercise regularly**, with help from an adult who knows what is right for your body.
- **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 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

American Academy
of Pediatrics



The American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of 55,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults.

American Academy of Pediatrics
Division of Publications
PO Box 747
Elk Grove Village, IL 60009-0747
Web site — <http://www.aap.org>

Copyright ©1994, Updated 11/98
American Academy of Pediatrics