

Suggestions for 15-18 Year Olds

As a teenager, you are well on your way through the many changes that take you from being a child to being an adult. Although it's exciting to be "growing up", sometimes you may have questions or problems as your body and your life keep changing. As your doctors, we want to assist you in keeping healthy and to help you with problems as they come up. We think that by now you are the one who knows yourself and your body the best. Therefore, you are the one most responsible for your health and we will want to spend most of our visit talking with you in private. We want you to feel like this is a time to ask questions and bring up concerns you may have about your health. Issues that are important for many teenagers that we will want to talk about include how things are going with your family, school, and friends. Adolescence is a time when some teenagers experiment with activities that may be dangerous or risky. We'll take some time to discuss such issues as smoking, drinking, drug use, and sexual activity. It is important for you to know that we will respect what you tell us in private. If a problem is dangerous to you, we may need to share it with your parents, but would always discuss this with you first. You are at an age that you should call us if you have questions about your health. Similarly, as a young adult, if you wish to arrange an appointment to discuss a problem, you may do so.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

1. Eat a balanced diet. Limit your fat and cholesterol intake. Avoid sugary drinks (soda, juice, sports drinks). Make sure you are getting enough Calcium, Vitamin D, and Iron. Maintain a healthy weight. (Talk to us if you think you are over-or under-weight.)
2. Engage in regular physical activity, such as walking, running, swimming, bike riding, and other sports. Ask us questions about fitness, weight training, or sports injuries. Don't use steroids, drugs or supplements to try to help your performance. They may have dangerous side effects.
3. Get sufficient and regular sleep. Don't let jobs, extra-curricular activities, or your social life get in the way of a "good night's sleep".
4. Take care of your teeth. Brush and floss regularly.
5. Always wear a seat belt while driving or riding in a car. If you are driving, drive safely and responsibly.
6. Avoid the use of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. Talk to us if you have concerns or questions about drugs.
7. Ask us about advice for the treatment of acne.
8. Know your body. Learn about its changes. Know how to avoid threats to your health, such as sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy.
9. Plan for the future. Think about what you'd like to do after you finish school. Use school to help prepare for adulthood.
10. Make sure to have FUN. Participate in extra-curricular activities, sports, hobbies, and activities with friends. If you have a job, don't overdo it. Leave time for fun.
11. Spend time with your family. Your parents can be wonderful friends and advisors. Show them you can accept responsibility and you can communicate as adults.
12. Avoid violent or angry confrontation with others. Avoid violent people and exposure to firearms. Ask adults for help in peaceful resolution of conflicts if necessary.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS OF 15-18 YEAR OLDS

As your child progresses through adolescence, you've certainly noticed the physical and developmental changes taking place. While this progress toward adulthood is exciting, there are certainly challenges and difficulties along the way for all teenagers and their parents. In our role as pediatricians, we hope to continue to be a source of help and information. One of the goals of normal adolescent development is to foster responsibility for their own health. We will, therefore, provide a major portion of the visit to talk privately with your child. Among the things we will discuss are changes taking place with the teenager's body; we will help your child to understand these changes. We will also spend some time talking about the serious health consequences of smoking, drinking, drug use, and sexual activity. Additionally, we will discuss how the teenager is doing in developing healthy school, home, and peer relationships and experiences. As we talk privately and confidentially about special concerns, it is important that you and your child know that we will advise parents of any behavior or situation that may be dangerous or life-threatening. To encourage personal responsibility for their health, we encourage adolescents to call with health-related questions and problems. Similarly, if they wish, we encourage older teenagers to arrange and be responsible for keeping their own appointments.

SOME HEALTH ISSUES

1. Immunizations recommended during the early adolescent years include a Tetanus-Diphtheria-Pertussis Booster (Tdap), the Meningococcal vaccine, and a second dose of the Varicella (Chicken Pox) vaccine. These should be administered to older adolescents who have not previously received these vaccines.
2. The series of three Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccines is recommended for adolescent girls to prevent genital warts and cervical cancer. It is now recommended for boys as well.
3. In greater Washington DC, it is not uncommon for children to be exposed to tuberculosis (TB). Therefore, we recommend a TB skin test for teenagers who may be at risk for being exposed, particularly if household members may have tuberculosis, immune system impairment, or who have emigrated from parts of the world where TB is common.

SOME ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF TEENS

1. Spend time with your adolescent. Now is the time you can really begin cultivating a relationship as an adult friend. The more relaxed and comfortable conversation you are able to have, the better the lines of communication will be when problems or disagreements do occur.
2. Establish fair rules to be followed at home. Discuss these rules with your child. Build responsibility by assigning chores. Consider allowance.
3. Follow your child's progress in school. Be encouraging, offer praise for school accomplishments. Encourage your child to make plans for the future and to gear his or her current program toward realistic plans. Make sure, however, that their plans are their own.
4. Honor your teenager's need to make independent choices. As adolescents mature, more choices should be their own.
5. Encourage the experience and responsibility that may be gained by extra-curricular activities and after school jobs. Attend events in which your child is a participant. Remind your teenager to avoid putting so many hours into such activities that they detract from school, family, and sleep time.
6. Contribute to self esteem. Show affection to your teenager. Respect your child's increasing need for privacy.
7. Continue to play an important role in your child's sex education. Ask us about resources that may be helpful.
8. Reinforce messages about driving safely and avoiding dangerous activities.
9. Don't keep firearms at home. Firearm associated accidents, homicides, and suicides occur tragically and too often for adolescents in our society.