

# Teen Checkups: A Message From Your Pediatrician

During your teen years, it's especially important to check in with your doctor (pediatrician) at least once a year. Whether or not you have any special health concerns, your health needs now are different from when you were younger. You're old enough to start taking charge of your own health, including learning how to prevent problems before they start.

## Just You and Your Doctor

When you are about 11 or 12 years old, your doctor might suggest that you begin spending some time with them on your own during your health care visits. Although it sometimes feels awkward to talk with your parents about personal stuff, your doctor is an expert in just that. Plus, your doctor cares about your health and wants to help you in any way they can.

They can offer answers about how your body works, how to care for yourself, how to handle your emotions, how to stay healthy, and how to talk about these questions with your parents.

Remember, your doctor will keep most of the information you talk about private! This privacy is called *confidentiality*. There may be exceptions, like a belief that your life or someone else's is in danger. And, in some states, the law may require doctors to share certain information. Feel free to ask your doctor about what's confidential.

## What You Can Talk About With Your Doctor

Here is a list of different topics you can talk about with your doctor.

- **Sports or school physical exams.** Most sports require a physical exam to play, and some teens need a physical exam before the start of a new school year. This is a great time to talk about your health with your doctor, including how to prevent injuries and how to stay healthy and fit.
- **Treatment of illnesses or injuries.** Have you been sick or injured lately? These are important changes to tell your doctor about. Let your doctor know about any pain you have or differences you feel.
- **Growth and development.** Your body is changing fast, so you might want to talk about these changes. You may want to ask
  - Will I be as tall as my parents?
  - What can I do about these pimples?
  - Why are my breasts uneven?
  - Why are my pajamas wet in the morning?
- **Personal or family problems.** Do you feel like your parents just don't understand you? Maybe you're being teased at school, feeling pressured from some friends, or being bullied. If you don't know where to turn, remember that your doctor is there to help.
- **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 doctor may be able to help you through this busy time in your life.
- **Alcohol or drug use.** You probably know teens who are using alcohol, cigarettes, or other drugs. Your doctor can explain how drinking, smoking, or taking other drugs can affect you and why staying away from them is smart.

- **Sex.** During visits with your doctor, you can ask questions about dating, sex, and other personal stuff. Unhealthy choices about sex could affect the rest of your life. Remember that what you and your doctor talk about is private. Questions about sex include how to protect yourself against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy. Your doctor can tell you whether tests related to these issues may show up on bills or records that your parents can see.
- **Conflicts with parents.** Are you having any problems at home? Does it sometimes seem like no one understands you or respects your ideas? Talk with your doctor. An outside person can offer new approaches to these difficult times. Your doctor might also have some ideas on how you and your parents can build healthy communication.
- **Referrals to other doctors for special health concerns.** You may have a medical concern that will require you to partner with a different doctor or specialist. In that case, your doctor can refer you to another doctor who can help you. Your doctor 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, here are ways 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 minor illnesses like colds.
- Know how to get medical help for signs and symptoms 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, alcohol or drug problems, or trouble getting along with friends, family, or teachers.
- Don't use alcohol, cigarettes/e-cigarettes/smokeless tobacco (chew), or other drugs.
- Make healthy decisions about sex, like delaying sex or using 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 doctor, you'll learn how to make the right decisions, helping you grow up healthy.

Visit [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.HealthyChildren.org) for more information.

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