

Making the Most of Checkups: Tips for parents and healthy teens

HEY SON, YOU'RE GONNA START THE SIXTH GRADE SOON, SO WE SHOULD TALK...ABOUT SEX. DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

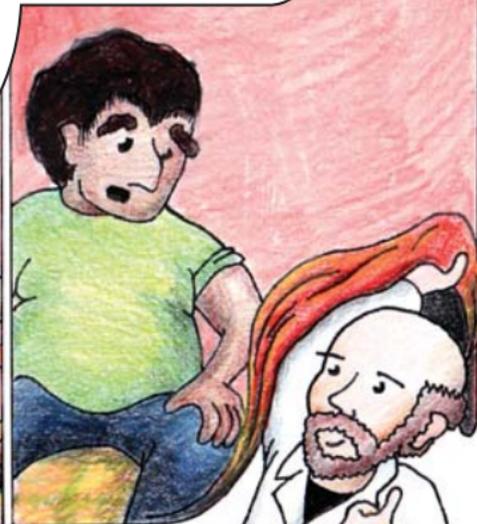


UM...NO, NOT REALLY. I DON'T EVEN LIKE GIRLS.



CAN I GO NOW?

WELL, UM, SURE, I GUESS. BUT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS YOU KNOW YOU CAN ASK ME ANYTHING.



IT'S IMPORTANT TO SHARE YOUR BELIEFS AND EXPECTATIONS WITH HIM OFTEN. HE ALSO NEEDS CHANCES TO ASK QUESTIONS AND GET ACCURATE INFORMATION. SOMETIMES, IT'S EASIER FOR KIDS TO ASK AN ADULT BESIDES A PARENT ABOUT SEX, THEIR BODIES AND OTHER HEALTH QUESTIONS. AT HIS NEXT WELL VISIT, I'LL GIVE HIM A CHANCE TO TALK TO ME ABOUT ANY HEALTH TOPIC IF HE WANTS.



FOR PARENTS, adolescence is a time full of developmental changes. Many parents have questions about what to expect from their son or daughter, and how to prepare for future changes. A great way to support your teen is to take him or her every year for a complete adolescent well visit, or checkup.

Sometimes we think of checkups as being only for babies and small children. But an annual visit to a health care provider is very important, even as your child moves into adolescence. The American Medical Association (AMA) strongly recommends that every person between ages 11 and 21 receive an annual checkup that looks at physical and mental health.



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What to Expect

A routine adolescent checkup should cover different topics and is more in-depth than a sports physical. A well visit includes checking blood pressure, vision, hearing and body mass index (BMI), and making sure that teens are up to date on their shots.

Your teen should also receive guidance and screening on:

- * Diet, exercise & weight management
- * Preventing injuries
- * Sexual health/sexual activity
- * Drinking, drugs and smoking
- * Depression and suicide risk
- * School performance
- * Medications

These visits are a time when parents can get health guidance from the health care provider.

How to Prepare

As a parent, it's important to schedule a checkup for your adolescent once every year. Before you call for an appointment, call your insurance company to find out what it will cover. Different health insurance policies have different levels of coverage for well visits. All Oregon-certified School-Based Health Centers provide adolescent well visits regardless of insurance status.

In this booklet, you will find a development guide that gives an overview of what to expect in the growth of your child from ages 11 to 15. At the end of the booklet are convenient tear-off cards for you and your teen to use at his or her's next well visit. The cards list important health topics that parents and youth might want to discuss during a health care appointment. The cards are designed to stay in your teen's chart for future reference.

Upon request this publication can be furnished in an alternate format for individuals with disabilities by contacting: Office of Family Health, Adolescent Health Section at (971) 673-0252. Available formats are: large print, Braille, audio tape recording, electronic format and oral presentation.

Development Guide: What to Expect from Your Adolescent

THE ADOLESCENT YEARS can be a confusing time for parents and teens alike. People have different ideas about what adolescence “looks like.” Provided here is a short guide to normal development for youth ages 11 to 15. The guide is broken down into four sections: Physical Development, Cognitive & Brain Development, Health Risks, and Social & Emotional Development. Each section contains an overview of what to expect and how your teen’s health care provider can help. At the end of the guide, you will find a brief list of parent-friendly recommended online resources on adolescent health.

Physical Development

You will likely notice changes in your child’s body during adolescence. Parents should keep in mind that the pace of normal development is different for every person. If your teen is concerned about developing earlier or later than friends, reassure him or her that their own rate of growth is healthy and normal.

Adolescence is also a time of sexual growth and change. In general, girls begin puberty about two years before boys. Both girls and boys may be more sensitive about their bodies. They will benefit from families who respect their need for privacy. This is also a time when teens may seek information on masturbation, menstruation, and/or sexual development and activity. These might be good topics for conversation between your teen and a health care provider where your teen can ask questions of a knowledgeable adult. In fact, your teen might feel more comfortable talking about these topics with someone other than a parent.

Physical Development, *continued*

Behaviors and beliefs related to physical activity, food and body image are especially relevant during early adolescence. Exercise and healthy eating habits started now are more likely to last into adulthood. Young teens, especially girls, may be more at risk for dieting and eating disorders. Parents can help by not criticizing weight or physical appearance, and by encouraging and showing healthy eating and exercise habits. If you start to see some of the following warning signs, it may mean that your teen has an eating problem. You and your teen should talk with his or her health care provider if you see any of the following warning signs:

- * Worrying about body appearance, weight and/or food
- * Dieting or making frequent excuses not to eat
- * Weight loss or sudden changes in weight
- * Anxiety around mealtimes
- * Excessive exercising, vomiting, fasting, or using laxatives to get rid of food consumed
- * Change or loss of menstrual period

Immunizations: A very important way to protect your teen's health is to make sure he or she is up to date on immunizations. Immunizations are just as important for adolescents as they are for babies. As of April 2007, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the following vaccines for youth ages 11 and 12 (for a current vaccine schedule, go to www.cdc.gov/nip/recs/child-schedule.htm):

- * **Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis).** One dose of Tdap is recommended when it's time for your teen's next tetanus/diphtheria booster. This new vaccine also provides protection against pertussis (whooping cough).
- * **HPV (human papillomavirus).** Three doses of HPV vaccine are recommended for young women. This vaccine provides protection against the virus that causes most cases of cervical cancer and genital warts. It is most effective if given before a female becomes sexually active.
- * **MCV4 (meningococcal conjugate).** One dose of this vaccine can protect against meningococcal disease (meningitis), a serious bacterial infection of the blood or fluid around the brain and spinal cord.



WHY ARE YOU WEARING THAT BANDAID?

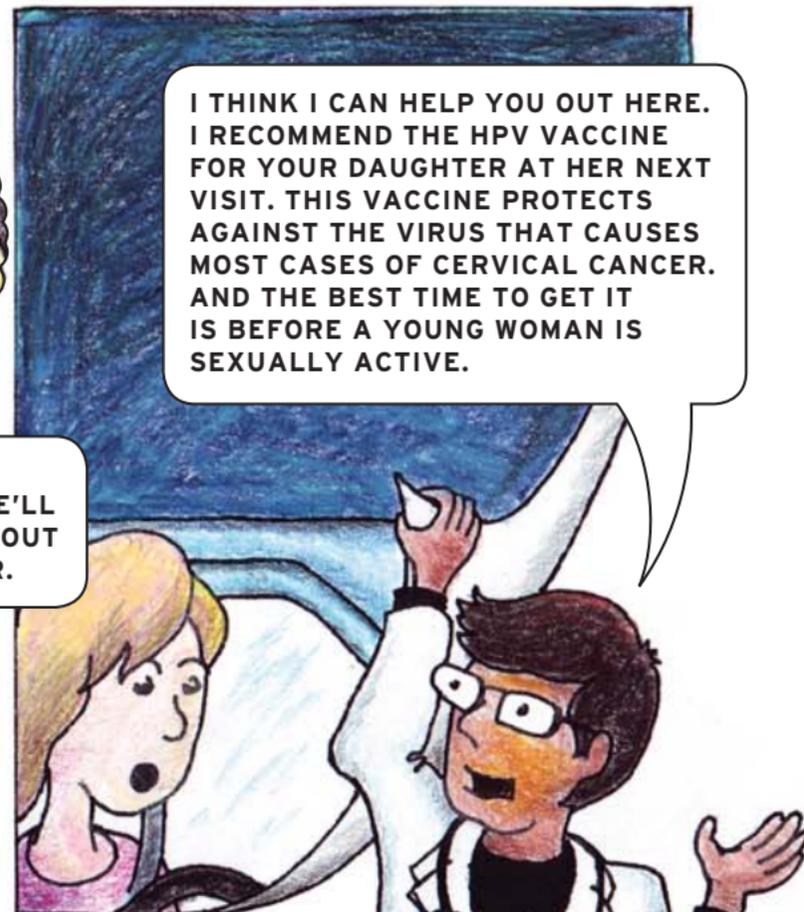
I WAS JUST AT THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE AND GOT A SHOT. SOMETHING WITH A FUNNY NAME, LIKE HPV.

HEY MOM, DO I HAVE TO GET THAT?



OH GOODNESS, ISN'T THAT FOR GIRLS WHO ARE SEXUALLY ACTIVE? SHE'S SO YOUNG...

I'M NOT SURE. WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT LATER.



I THINK I CAN HELP YOU OUT HERE. I RECOMMEND THE HPV VACCINE FOR YOUR DAUGHTER AT HER NEXT VISIT. THIS VACCINE PROTECTS AGAINST THE VIRUS THAT CAUSES MOST CASES OF CERVICAL CANCER. AND THE BEST TIME TO GET IT IS BEFORE A YOUNG WOMAN IS SEXUALLY ACTIVE.

Social & Emotional Development

Friendships play a much bigger role in the lives of teens than they do for children. Being accepted by peers is very important to most youth. However, most teens still care a lot about what their parents and families think, even if they may not show it clearly. Balancing peer and family relationships may be tricky for some teens. Parents can help by supporting their teenagers' new independence, while also clearly sharing family values and setting limits.

As they develop, teens may also have more dramatic emotional shifts. This is partly related to the changes in brain development discussed later in the booklet. The emotional center of the brain – the amygdala – sometimes takes on the role of decision-maker as other parts of the brain are still changing. This can add to teen mood swings. At the same time, teens are coping with more stress from school, friendships, sports and other activities. They are also starting to become more separate from their parents. Parents who can maintain a stable and supportive role in their teenagers' lives will decrease some of that stress while still allowing their adolescents to explore new parts of life.

Some youth may need more emotional support to get through the ups and downs of adolescence. Teens are at especially high risk for depression, and suicide is one of the leading causes of death among adolescents. Listed below are some warning signs that may mean your son or daughter is depressed or considering suicide. If you notice one or more signs, talk to your teen about your concerns and seek help immediately. Your teen's health care provider is a great place to find out about options (If you need immediate help, call the National Suicide Prevention Line at **1(800) 273-TALK**). Warning signs include:

- * Showing little interest in the future
- * Giving or throwing away favorite belongings
- * Showing sudden changes in personality
- * Making statements like, "You'd be better off without me."
- * Talking about death, suicide, the afterlife
- * Frequent sadness or crying
- * Social isolation and/or stopping favorite activities
- * Frequent school absences or a sudden change in grades



HEY SON, WANNA GO SHOOT SOME HOOPS?

NO...NOT REALLY, SORRY.



HE'S GOING TO HATE ME FOR THIS. BUT I JUST CAN'T DEAL WITH DOING ANYTHING RIGHT NOW.

EVERYTHING OKAY?

I'M FINE.



WE USED TO PLAY BALL TOGETHER ALL THE TIME. THESE DAYS, HE BARELY TALKS TO ME, HE'S STOPPED HANGING OUT WITH HIS FRIENDS AND HIS GRADES HAVE DROPPED. I GUESS THIS IS JUST WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A TEENAGER...

ACTUALLY, THOSE ARE ALL THINGS THAT COULD BE SIGNS OF DEPRESSION. AT HIS NEXT DOCTOR'S VISIT, THIS IS A TOPIC I COULD DISCUSS WITH HIM AND WE COULD SEE IF A DEPRESSION SCREENING IS APPROPRIATE.

Health Risks

During the teen years, youth can be more vulnerable to health risks such as drinking, drugs, smoking and sexual activity. While many teens do not take part in these behaviors, almost all young people will be exposed to them during adolescence. Tell your teen that he or she has the power to make healthy decisions. Many parents of teens who drink, smoke or are sexually active don't know that their children are participating in these activities. Parents should set realistic limits and always know where their teens are and who they are with. This will encourage good decision-making. Honest and open communication with your son or daughter about your expectations can be very valuable. Again, your teen's health care provider can help by talking to your son or daughter about these topics.

Media attention and popular beliefs may make it seem as if most teens are having sex, smoking and drinking. This is not true. In 2006, fewer than 15% of Oregon 8th graders reported ever having had sexual intercourse. Fewer than 10% reported smoking in the past month, and one-third reported drinking alcohol in the past month. While it is very important to pay attention to these behaviors, parents should also realize that most teens are healthy and show good judgment.

Some possible warning signs of an alcohol or drug problem include:

- * Changes in mood or attitude
- * Sudden change in grades/attendance
- * Loss of interest in school, sports or other activities that used to be enjoyable
- * Smell of alcohol on breath or sudden, frequent use of gum/breath mints
- * Resistance to discipline at school or at home
- * Associating with new friends whom your teen refuses to discuss

Please keep in mind that this information cannot take the place of a full clinical assessment. Parents who have concerns about possible substance use by their teen should immediately talk to a health care provider.

Parents should also know that areas of unhealthy behavior might change from one generation to the next (for example, Internet addiction, steroid use, etc.). It may be hard to keep up with the latest issues facing teens, but the more that parents know, the better. Again, your teen's health care provider may be a great source of information and/or resources on current adolescent unhealthy behaviors.

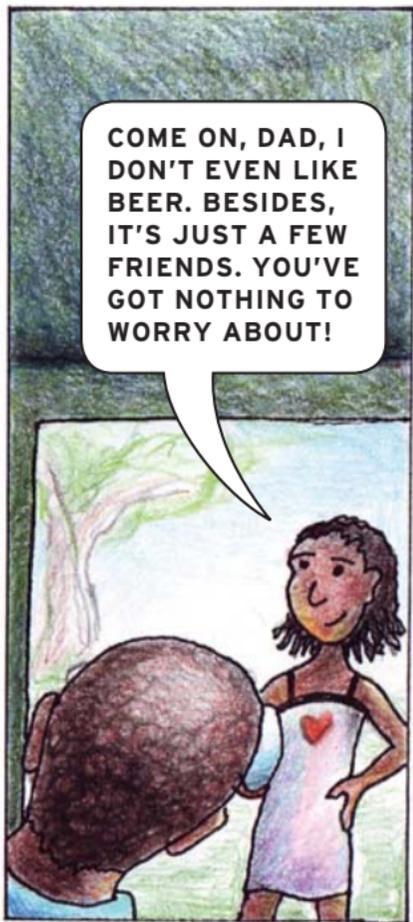


I'M GOING TO MEGAN'S FOR THE NIGHT. SEE YOU TOMORROW, DAD!

WAIT A SEC! WHAT ARE YOU DOING AT MEGAN'S?

ARE HER PARENTS GOING TO BE THERE?

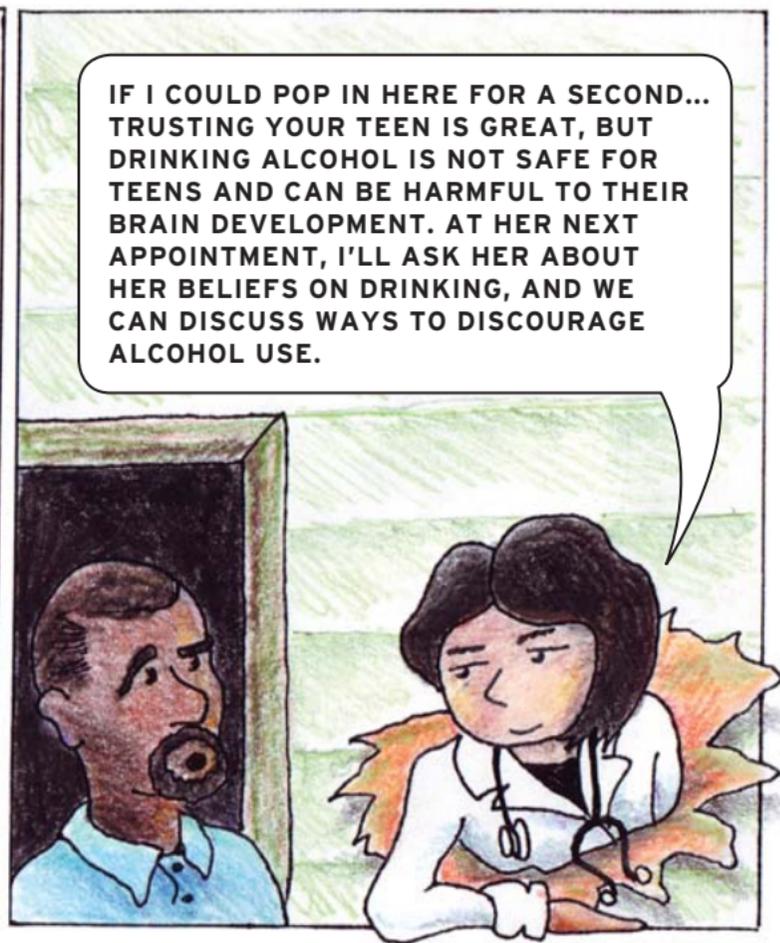
WILL THERE BE ALCOHOL?



COME ON, DAD, I DON'T EVEN LIKE BEER. BESIDES, IT'S JUST A FEW FRIENDS. YOU'VE GOT NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT!



I WANT TO TRUST HER. BUT WHEN I WAS HER AGE, LOTS OF KIDS DRANK ALCOHOL.



IF I COULD POP IN HERE FOR A SECOND... TRUSTING YOUR TEEN IS GREAT, BUT DRINKING ALCOHOL IS NOT SAFE FOR TEENS AND CAN BE HARMFUL TO THEIR BRAIN DEVELOPMENT. AT HER NEXT APPOINTMENT, I'LL ASK HER ABOUT HER BELIEFS ON DRINKING, AND WE CAN DISCUSS WAYS TO DISCOURAGE ALCOHOL USE.

Cognitive & Brain Development

Just as teens' bodies are changing, their brains are also in flux. Brain development is one of the biggest areas of change during adolescence. If parents can learn how this affects their adolescent's decision-making, it can help strengthen a healthy parent-teen relationship.

The part of the brain that controls planning, logic and impulse control – the prefrontal cortex – is still under construction well into adolescence. Many decisions get redirected to the amygdala, which is the emotional center of the brain. This means that the teen tends to make decisions "from the gut" rather than logically. As a parent, when you sometimes feel your son or daughter is "overreacting" or "totally misinterpreting," you have likely met their developing brain in action.

To support your teen's developing brain, it is helpful to encourage him or her to practice good decision-making skills in a caring environment. Children as young as 11 can learn how to be good advocates for themselves. As a parent, you can provide supervision while allowing your teen room to develop independence. This could mean letting your child plan social events with friends, or encouraging him or her to volunteer for a favorite cause. This will help strengthen brain development.

Keeping track of school performance is an important job for parents of adolescents. Parents should pay special attention to a sudden change in grades and/or level of frustration with school and learning. Either of these may be a sign of a learning disability that does not show up until after elementary school. Close communication with your teen's teachers is essential. A health care provider can also be a helpful resource.

Resources for Parents & Teens

Bright Futures: Guidelines for Health Supervision

www.brightfutures.org

(National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health)

Bright Futures is a comprehensive health document that is supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics. It contains detailed family-friendly information on adolescence, and guides for parents and teens to help support their health care.

TeensHealth

www.teenshealth.org

(The Nemours Foundation's Center for Children's Health Media)

TeensHealth provides a place for youth to learn about topics ranging from healthy sexuality to mental health/depression to nutrition/exercise. There is also a section of the site just for parents to learn more about supporting their teen's health.

Parent-Teen

www.parent-teen.com

Parent-teen.com is an online magazine that has resources, articles and information on a variety of topics related to adolescence. Health professionals answer common parenting questions.

Checklist Instructions

THE TEAR-OFF CARDS on the back page list some important health issues for teens. Many of these topics are covered during a normal adolescent well visit, but you can check off the ones that are especially important to you on the parents' card. This will tell your teen's health care provider which issues you would like to talk about at your child's next physical exam. Remember that your son or daughter's provider can be an ally to you in promoting his or her health. The card can help "break the ice" if there are topics you want to discuss, but aren't sure about the best way to bring them up.

You can use the card for teens as a way to help your child think about questions that he or she might want to ask. Having this talk with your teen before going in for a well visit can be a great way to prepare both of you. Just bring both cards to the appointment, give them to the health care provider, and ask to have them placed in your teen's file. Also, you can support your adolescent's growing independence by letting him or her know that it's okay to talk to their provider confidentially. Teens can also fill out their own card on the back side.

FOR PARENTS

I would like to talk to my teen's health care provider today about these topics (check all that apply):

- Diet, nutrition & exercise
- Physical growth/development
- Obesity/BMI
- HPV immunization (cervical cancer)
- Other immunizations (Tdap, meningococcal, etc.)
- School performance
- Vision or hearing
- Healthy relationships
- Other:
- Pregnancy prevention/contraception
- Medications
- Depression/mental health
- Drinking or drug use
- Smoking
- Eating disorders
- Parenting skills
- Violence or abuse
- Safety/injury prevention
- Family health history

Please write any details on items you checked above (why you are concerned, recent events, etc.):

Child's Name:

Age:

Today's date:

FOR YOUTH

Remember, it is okay for you to ask to speak to your provider alone during part of your visit. I would like to talk with my health care provider today about these topics:

- Health & fitness (eating, exercise, diets, etc.)
- My body
- HPV immunization (cervical cancer)
- Other immunizations (Tdap, meningococcal, etc.)
- My sexual health
- Healthy relationships (with my parents, boyfriend/girlfriend, friends)
- Other:
- School/grades
- Vision or hearing
- Medications
- Depression/mental health
- Drinking or drugs
- Smoking
- Violence or abuse
- Safety/injury prevention
- Family health history

You can use this space to write in more information for your health care provider about why you checked any topics in the list above:

Your Name:

Age:

Today's date: