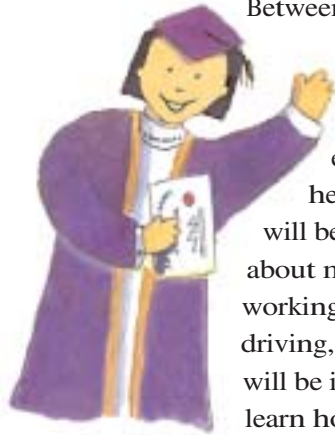


# Adolescence

## (11–21 Years)

### A Journey from Childhood to Adult Life



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 give your health professional a chance to make sure your adolescent is healthy and developing as she should. 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)

\* If previously recommended doses were missed or were given earlier than recommended.

## 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. Here are some issues to think about as she grows and changes.

### *Help Your Adolescent Feel Good About Herself*

- Show affection. Praise her efforts and achievements.
- Respect her need for privacy.
- Teach her how to deal with stress.
- Encourage her to set reasonable but challenging goals.
- Emphasize the importance of school. Show interest in her school activities.
- Decide together when she is ready to do certain things on her own.



### *Encourage Good Feelings Within the Family*

- Spend time together doing things you enjoy, like playing board games and cooking.
- Understand that your adolescent may be unwilling to participate in family activities. As she tries to become more independent, she may challenge your authority.
- Be flexible in making and enforcing rules. Adjust your rules as she grows in independence and responsibility.
- Share responsibility for the family by giving your adolescent household chores. For example, ask your 12-year-old to help wash the dishes. Or ask your 18-year-old to shop for groceries.

### *Help Your Adolescent Feel Good About Others*

- Show her how to get along and work well with others.
- Encourage her to get involved in group activities, such as studying with classmates, playing sports, or participating in after-school activities.
- Spend time together volunteering. Look for opportunities at local schools, libraries, hospitals, or nursing homes.
- Talk with her about how to choose friends and have good relationships.
- Explore ways to help her deal with peer pressure.

### *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.”

## The Stages of Adolescence

Young adolescents are concerned with their appearance and the ways their bodies are changing. Many are reassured to learn that everyone's body matures at a different pace.

### *Early Adolescence (ages 11 to 14)*

Physical change is the main event of this period. Your adolescent's hormone levels will rise, bringing about the changes of puberty. Girls develop pubic hair and breasts, and

begin to menstruate. In boys, the testicles grow and wet dreams begin. Face and pubic hair appears and their voices deepen. Both boys and girls may develop acne.

### *Middle Adolescence (ages 15 to 17)*

Girls usually complete puberty earlier than boys. Most will be physically mature by now. Boys may still be maturing physically. During these years, boys rapidly gain muscle mass, strength, and

height, and usually finish the development of sexual characteristics.

### *Late Adolescence (ages 18 to 21)*

During these years, your adolescent will complete most of his physical development. He may start taking responsibility for his own health. He will develop the capacity for emotional intimacy, and will focus on achieving independence and creating a sense of identity as an adult.

## 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.

### *Plan Ahead for Safety*

- Make sure your adolescent has the names and phone numbers of people to call in case of emergency. Explain what to do if there's a fire or accident in your home.
- When your adolescent goes out, ask where he is going, with whom, and when he will be back. Discuss what he is planning to do. Ask him to call you if his plans change.
- Discuss his ideas for settling conflicts without violence. Explore safe, constructive ways to express anger.
- 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. Talking about them shows him that you care and want to help him make good decisions. (See box "Talking to Your Adolescent About Hard Issues.")

- Help him plan ahead for uncomfortable situations. Discuss what he can do if he is in a group where someone is using drugs, under pressure to have sex, or offered a ride from someone who has been drinking.
- Remove guns from the home, or keep guns unloaded and locked up.

### *Adolescents and Cars: Tips to Reduce Risks*

- Agree on rules for when and where he can use the car.
- Make an agreement about who can ride with him.
- Be firm about safe driving rules. For example, be sure that he wears a safety belt and obeys speed limits and traffic lights. Insist that he never drink and drive.
- Be a role model. Follow these safe driving practices, too. Start discussing safe driving long before he gets his driver's license.

### *Things to Discuss with Your Health Professional*

- A plan for handling emergencies or injuries.
- Community alcohol, tobacco, and other drug prevention and treatment programs.
- Sexual maturity; contraception; prevention of sexually transmitted diseases; abstinence; and other issues related to sexuality.



## Talking to Your Adolescent About Hard Issues

Before your child enters adolescence, begin talking with him about drugs, drinking, smoking, and sexual development. Continue your talks as he moves through adolescence. Ask him what he knows and thinks about these issues, and share with him your beliefs. Most importantly, listen to what he says and try to answer his questions honestly and directly. It may be hard to talk about these things, but it is very important for your adolescent to feel that he has someone to talk to. If you can't do it, turn to a health professional or another adult you trust to help you.

Your adolescent may face a lot of peer pressure to have sex, use drugs, drink, or smoke. Help him find ways to refuse without losing face. Also, discuss the importance of choosing friends who do not act in dangerous or unhealthy ways.

### *Sexuality*

- ✓ Explain to him that sexual feelings are normal but that having sex should be a well-thought-out decision. He should delay having sex until he and his partner are mature enough to assume responsibility for the consequences of sexual activity.
- ✓ Discuss your beliefs about sex, love, and personal responsibility. Talking about your own experiences can lead to meaningful discussions. Don't feel that talking about these issues will encourage him to have sex. He should know that you are there to guide him if he needs help making choices.
- ✓ Talk about ways to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), even if you have advised your adolescent to delay sexual activity. Explain that most birth control methods prevent only

pregnancy. Only latex condoms help reduce the risk of both pregnancy and STDs such as HIV.

- ✓ Discuss any confusion or concerns he has about his sexual feelings (for the same sex or opposite sex).

### *Risky Behaviors*

- ✓ Teach him about the dangers of smoking, alcohol, inhalants, and drugs. Explain how using these can lead to addiction, cancer, heart disease, and motor vehicle crashes.
- ✓ Look for signs of alcohol or drug abuse, such as changes in dress, falling grades, different friends, mood swings, violent behavior, and problems at school or with the law. (These may also be signs of emotional or mental health problems. Talk with your health professional about how to deal with these issues.)



## 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.



### *Build Healthy Habits for a Lifetime*

- Encourage him to try a variety of sports and physical activities. Team or individual sports are an option. But everyday tasks are also forms of physical activity. He gets exercise when he walks the dog, rakes and plays in the leaves, washes the car, and joins neighborhood clean-up events.
- Be active. Plan physically active family outings, like hikes and bike rides.
- Encourage him to exercise for 30 to 60 minutes, at least three times a week.
- Agree on how much time he may spend watching TV, playing video and computer games, or using the Internet.

### *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.

### *Healthy Eating at Home*

- Prepare nutritious meals with breads, cereals, and grains; fruits and vegetables; chicken, fish, and lean meats; and low-fat dairy products.
- Encourage everyone in the family to have healthy eating habits. Eat meals together as often as you can.
- Start the day off right. Encourage your adolescent to have a good breakfast.
- Keep nutritious snacks in the house. Avoid buying foods and beverages that are high in fat or sugar, such as candy, chips, or soft drinks.

### *Healthy Eating Away from Home*

- Explain the importance of eating three nutritious meals a day. Emphasize that skipping meals is unhealthy.
- Encourage your adolescent to select a healthy lunch from the school cafeteria. Or pack a balanced lunch.
- Fast foods like french fries, burgers, soda, and pizza are high in fat or sugar. Encourage your adolescent to choose these foods less often and in smaller portions.



### *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. A team effort is the best way to support good oral health. You, your adolescent, and the dentist form a partnership built on a shared history and trust.

### *Prevent Tooth Decay*

- Remind your adolescent to brush his teeth twice a day and to floss daily.
- Encourage him to eat a variety of healthy foods to maintain better oral health.
- Discourage him from smoking or using chewing tobacco.

### *Protect the Teeth and Mouth from Injury*

- Teach him to wear a mouth guard for sports. Be sure he wears a helmet when riding a bike or skating.
- Plan how to handle dental emergencies. Know what to do if he loses or breaks a tooth.

### *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.

### *School Achievement*

- Encourage her to become more responsible for her attendance, homework, and course selection.
- She may be anxious about going from middle/junior high school to high school. Discuss her concerns with her, her teachers, or her health professional.
- If she feels frustrated with school or is thinking about dropping out, discuss her feelings and options.
- Encourage her to participate in school activities, such as drama, band, math team, or sports.
- Show your interest by attending her school plays, concerts, team games, and other special events.
- Help her begin setting goals for the future. When she's in high school, encourage her to think about college, vocational training, the military, or other career choices.

### *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.

