

Teen FAQ's

The teen years are an exciting and sometimes difficult time for kids and parents. Here are some common questions and concerns that parents have:

When should my teen stop seeing a pediatrician?

Teenagers are generally healthy. Most of the time during visits to the doctor is spent talking about lifestyle, diet, emotional health and risky behaviors and habits. Who they see is up to them and the doctor, since all pediatricians have different levels of comfort and expertise with teens and teen issues. Some teens prefer to be seen by a Family Practitioner or a provider who sees mostly adults, but if they have a good relationship with their pediatrician, they may want to stay with them because they feel comfortable discussing difficult topics with them.

Your teen should have a chance to see the doctor alone once you've shared your questions and concerns. These visits are confidential, and the provider won't routinely talk to you about the details of what happened while you were gone. The goal is to encourage your teen to share information and discuss their own health as well as topics like relationships, sex, drugs, smoking, mental health and diet, and give them the information they need to make good choices.

How do I talk to my teen about sex, alcohol and other drugs, and smoking?

Teenagers learn about these topics from many sources – TV, movies, books, magazines, friends, school and watching the adults around them. Some of these sources may provide incorrect or dangerous information, and others may not share your values and beliefs. This is why it's critical for parents to be good role models, talk honestly with their kids about these topics and make sure that you are available when issues or questions arise. Family dinners have been shown to reduce teen's risks for unhealthy and dangerous behaviors. They are a consistent time to "check in" and talk about their friends, what's going on at school, what activities they're involved in, and to let them know what you think about what's going on in their world. Take a look at the books and websites listed below if you are really unsure how to begin this conversation.

How much should my teen eat?

Teen's appetites vary depending on how active they are and how much they're growing. Food is also a way that teens can test their independence. Parents should make sure that their teens have access to healthy foods and teach them to make good choices, especially once your child has their own money to spend - you want to minimize the amount of money they're spending on vending machines or fast food. Teens who eat most of their meals at home have a healthier diet than those who don't. Family dinners, eating breakfast and having healthy foods available are good ways to make sure this happens.

Calcium is important, especially for girls. To avoid osteoporosis later in life, teens should drink milk, eat dairy products like cheese and yogurt, green vegetables like broccoli and kale, or calcium fortified foods such as cereal, bread and orange juice. Breakfast is the most frequently

skipped meal. Teens usually say they aren't hungry in the morning or don't have time. Breakfast provides energy to participate and concentrate in school and helps prevent an unhealthy mid-morning snack or lunch.

How do I know if my teen has an eating disorder?

Eating disorders are common and dangerous. They affect girls more frequently, but boys can also be affected. Some signs to watch out for are weight loss, preoccupation with or restricting food or calories, skipping meals, strict rules about food, guilt about eating, being critical of their weight or body, and compulsive exercising. If your child exhibits any of these behaviors, discuss it with them and their doctor.

Why does my kid sleep so late?

Parents are often surprised and frustrated by teenager's sleep habits. Many teens go to bed late because of homework, activities and socializing. Teens need to get 9 to 10 hours of sleep per night, and if they do not get this during the week, they will make up for it on weekends. The challenge is to ensure that the teen gets enough sleep and manages their time wisely. That may mean setting rules and limiting activities to ensure that they go to bed at a reasonable hour, and maybe planning activities later on weekend mornings.

One frequent culprit in keeping kids up late is electronics. Computers, cell phones, video games and TV all have their place in our lives, but it's too easy for teens to spend hours in front of a screen when they should be getting their homework done or getting to sleep. Set a rule that all cell phones (including parents') should be off and on the charger after 8PM or whatever time is reasonable for your family. Same rule for TV, video games, TV or non-homework computer use. Turn it off at least an hour before bedtime, to make sure your teen isn't up too late as a result of time in front of the screens.

Where can I get more information?

The Teenage Body Book, Kathy McCoy, et al

The American Academy of Pediatrics: Caring for your Teenager, Donald E. Greydanus, MD, editor

American Girl Library - The Care and Keeping of You: The Body Book for Girls, by Valerie Lee Schaefer

What's Going On Down There? Answers to Questions Boys Find Hard to Ask, Karen Gravelle with Nick and Chava Castro

How to Talk with Teens About Love, Relationships, & S-E-X, Amy G. Miron, MS and Charles D. Miron, PhD

Field Guide to the American Teenager, Michael Riera and Joseph De Prisco

Questions Kids Ask About Sex: Honest Answers for Every Age, The Medical Institute for Sexual Health

<http://www.healthychildren.org/english/ages-stages/teen>

<http://health.nih.gov/category/ChildTeenHealth>