

BENEFICIARY EDUCATION FACT SHEET #5

Information for Beneficiaries on Adolescent Health

During the transition from childhood to adulthood, adolescents establish patterns of behavior and make lifestyle choices that affect both their current and future health. The purpose of this fact sheet is to help parents develop a preventive framework that will keep their adolescent in good health as he/she becomes an adult. Also included is a look at the family role in health care, parents' interaction with their children, key health risks, and role modeling.

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The Family Role in Health Promotion

As a parent, you have the opportunity to shape your child's health. **Role modeling** healthy behaviors is important in facilitating your adolescent's successful transition from childhood to adulthood.

Work Together—Role model. Communication is the cornerstone of a relationship with your child or teen. Many parents find it difficult to communicate with their children, particularly during the teenage years. To better communicate with your child¹:

- Start early – talk to children throughout their entire lives.
 - If you have a hard time finding topics, discuss problems in the news as a starter.

- Be available – set aside enough time to deal with the subject at hand.
 - Don't let the TV, telephone, or other distractions interrupt.
 - Eat dinner together as a family, as often as possible.
- Engage adolescents with non-threatening questions.
 - Ask your teen's permission first if you want to start a discussion.
 - Avoid "why" questions; they put adolescents on the defensive.
 - Encourage teens to think through the issues out loud without challenging their point of view.
- Be a good listener.
 - Listen for tone as well as words. Watch body language.
 - Validate what you can when you listen. There will be opportunities for dissent later.
 - Encourage teens to express their feelings.
 - Be ready to hear opinions you may not agree with.
 - Resist the urge to lecture or nag.
 - Ask questions when asked but don't pretend you know all the answers and admit when you are wrong. Let teens know when you have to go to other sources for information and then follow-up.
 - Recognize and thank him or her for trusting you to listen.
- Be a role model for decision-making strategies, such as defining the problem and looking at the pros and cons.
- Be a role model for good communication with others.

Spend time with your child. Not having enough time together with their parents is a top concern among teens. Approximately 15% of 8th graders, 20% of 10th graders, and 30% of 12th graders report rarely or never eating dinner with their family.¹

- Find ways to spend time with your adolescent, even if it is in brief increments. For example, have your teen drive you to the grocery store and help you shop, or pick your teen up after a sports game and take him or her out for a healthy snack.

Adolescent Health

13 to 18 Years of Age

Well-child preventive health visits continue through adolescence. These visits are essential in order to maintain and promote the health of your growing child. At some or all of your adolescent's well-child visits, his/her primary care provider will:

- Conduct a physical examination that will include: medical history and physical, including height, weight, blood pressure, vision, hearing screening, and a developmental/behavioral assessment.
- Review diet intake; physical activity; tobacco, alcohol, and drug use; sexual activity; and discuss the effects of smoking, drinking, and drug use.
- Perform laboratory testing, including:
 - √ Urinalysis, once between 11 and 18 years of age.
 - √ Cholesterol screening, based on risk.
 - √ Iron deficiency, based on risk.
 - √ Diabetes screening, based on risk.

- √ Sexually transmitted infection (STI) screening, based on risk.
- √ Lead screening, based on risk.
- √ TB test, based on risk.

Immunizations

If your child missed any vaccinations as an infant or young child, it's time to make up for it now. Here is a review:

- *Chickenpox (varicella)* if not previously received. Chickenpox immunization is recommended for teens and adults who are not already immune to the virus. An unvaccinated child with no history of chicken pox should be vaccinated between 11 and 12 years of age. Unvaccinated adolescents 13 years of age and older should receive 2 doses of varicella vaccine at least 1 month apart.
- *Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis booster (DPT)* is usually only given as a booster shot or if it has been at least 5 years since the last (DPT) dose was received. Two new combination booster vaccines that include pertussis are now available.
- *Hepatitis A (Hep A)* may be recommended for adolescents who live in communities where outbreaks of hepatitis A have recently occurred.
- *Hepatitis B (Hep B)*: If not previously received, the hepatitis B vaccine series should be given to anyone 18 years of age or younger.
- *Human papillomavirus (HPV)*: If not previously received, your adolescent should receive the HPV vaccine.
- *Influenza inactivated vaccine (flu shot) or nasal spray vaccine (FluMist®)*: Adolescents should be vaccinated annually or as otherwise recommended.
- *Measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR)* should be given if not previously received.
- *Meningococcal vaccine*, also called Menactra, is recommended for all adolescents between 11 and 12 years of age.
- *Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV)* is recommended for adolescents with certain chronic diseases or who live where there is increased risk for infection.

Oral Health

Teens need to continue the good **oral hygiene habits** that were started in childhood. Remind your teenager to brush with a fluoride toothpaste at least twice a day and floss their teeth at least once a day. Take your child to see a dental professional every 6 months or as otherwise recommended. As your teenager matures, encourage he/she to take responsibility for his/her own dental appointments.

- Find out if your teenager's usual source of drinking water is fluorinated. If not, ask your dentist about fluoride varnishes or supplements.
- Nutrition matters! Be a role model. Encourage teens to eat regular nutritious meals and to make smart food choices.
- Help your teen learn to say "NO" to tobacco and alcohol. If you need help, ask for it.
- Be sure your teen uses a mouth guard and helmet to prevent injuries during sports activities.

Key Health Risks: Adolescents

Poor Nutrition and a Lack of Physical Activity

Good nutrition is just as important for adolescents as it is for children. Yet, many adolescents do not have healthy diets. For example, almost 80% of young people do not eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables.² Teenage boys who are active require about 2,800 calories per day and should eat the highest range of servings listed below. Teenage girls who are active require about 2,200 calories per day and should eat servings in the middle of the range listed below.

- Vegetables: 3 to 5 servings.
- Fruits: 2 to 4 servings.
- Whole grains: 6 to 11 servings (e.g., whole-wheat breads, cereals, and pastas, and brown rice).
- Milk, yogurt, and cheese: 2 to 3 servings (teens should have 3 or more servings of foods rich in calcium).
- Meats, poultry, fish, dried beans and peas, eggs, and nuts: 2 to 3 servings.

Eating the right types of food is important. A poor diet, one that is deficient in protein or key nutrients, can put an adolescent at risk for a host of health problems. For example, too little food or the wrong food can affect sexual maturation and growth. Your adolescent's primary care provider should be familiar enough with your teenager to detect when there are dietary deviations or risk factors for an eating disorder. A diet and nutritional history is necessary when assessing adolescents during check-ups. Evaluation of adolescent nutrition should include:

1. Weighing and measuring and comparing to previous values. Make note of any weight loss, excessive weight gain, or failure to grow.
2. Amount of physical activity.
3. Quality, quantity, and number of meals per day.
4. Sexual maturation and menstruation history.

Remember to encourage your teen to eat healthfully:

- Always keep healthy snacks such as yogurt, fruit, and cut vegetables on hand.
- Ask your teen to help you shop or cook once a week so that they learn healthy ways to prepare food.
- Try to select restaurants that offer healthy meals for family outings.

The rate of growth in adolescence is second only to the rate in infancy. Poor eating habits during the teen years may lead to both short- and long-term health consequences including obesity, osteoporosis, and sexual maturation delays.



Nearly 9 million youth in the United States aged 6 to 19 years are overweight. Children become overweight or obese when

they take in too much food, and expend too little energy. Because most people in the United States are sedentary (they sit) most of the day, it takes a special effort to make sure physical activity is an important part of your child's daily routine.

The U.S. Surgeon General recommends **moderate to vigorous physical activity** each week. In 2005, only 36% of 9th to 12th graders participated in the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity per day.² Without adequate physical activity, adolescents are at risk for overweight, obesity, diabetes, and –later in life – cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, and other problems.²

Every teen can choose a type of physical activity for optimal health. Some teens enjoy and participate in sports. Others may feel awkward about their bodies, and don't want to look clumsy in front of their peers. Alternatives to team activities include weight training, jogging, biking, roller blading, skateboarding, dancing, and swimming. Teens need to be encouraged to meet the following recommendations:

- Moderate physical activity, equivalent to brisk walking, 30 minutes a day, at least 10 minutes at a time, 5 or more days a week.
- Vigorous physical activity – such as jogging – for at least 20 minutes a day, 3 or more days a week.

Physical activity helps self-esteem and reduces stress. It promotes a positive self-image and a sense of achievement. The habits formed in youth make a difference when we get older. Staying fit lowers the risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Alcohol abuse is the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States, and is a factor in approximately 41% of all deaths from motor vehicle crashes. Alcohol is the most commonly used substance among adolescents.³

- Half of 8th graders and 75% of 12th graders say they have taken more than a sip of alcohol.⁴
- About 10% of 8th graders, 20% of 10th graders, and 30% of 12th graders report binge drinking (consuming five or more drinks in a row) at least once in the past two weeks.⁵
- About 2% to 3% of teens in grades 8, 10, and 12 say they used methamphetamines in the past month.⁵

Tobacco Use

Each day in the United States nearly 4,000 adolescents under the age of 18 try a cigarette and every year nearly 1,140 adolescents become regular smokers.⁶ Tobacco use contributes to many diseases and is the primary underlying cause of death in the United States. Each year, approximately 440,000 individuals die as a result of smoking,⁷ accounting for 20% of all deaths in the United States annually.⁸ Nearly 80% of all adult smokers began smoking before they turned 18 years old.

- Teen tobacco use impairs how the lungs grow and function, increases respiratory illness, and increases the risk of cardiovascular disease.
- Teens who smoke cigarettes are more likely to take risks such as ignoring seat belts, getting into fights, and carrying weapons than teens who do not smoke.
- During 2003, 20.8% of high school students smoked cigarettes daily.⁹
- Peer pressure is the greatest influencing factor in teen tobacco choices.

Among adolescents who already smoke, 40% believe they are **addicted**.¹⁰ Recent research has shown that addiction occurs after fewer cigarettes over a shorter period than previously thought. Girls seem to get hooked quicker than boys: On average it takes a girl 3 months and a boy 6 months to become addicted to nicotine.¹⁰ In addition to the negative health effects of tobacco use, smoking increases the risk of other high-risk behaviors. Compared to teens who do not smoke, adolescent smokers are:

- 3 times more likely to use alcohol.
- 8 times more likely to use marijuana.
- 22 times more likely to use cocaine.

Talk to your child about the dangers of **tobacco** early and often. Research shows that the immediate adverse health effects of tobacco use (e.g., “smoking makes your teeth turn yellow”) are more salient to teenagers than the long-term effects (e.g., “if you smoke you will get lung cancer), but both messages are important to communicate. Be a good role model and don’t smoke yourself or let anyone smoke around your child. Make it clear that your home, yard, and car are **smoke-free areas**.

Injury and Violence

Approximately 84% of all deaths among adolescents aged 10 to 24 years are attributed to injuries from only four causes: motor vehicle crashes (37%), unintentional injuries (16%), homicide (18%), and suicide (13%).¹¹

Unintentional Injuries

Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death among 11- to 19-year-olds in the United States.³ Most unintentional injuries are not accidents because they can be prevented.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death among 15 to 19-year-olds.¹¹ Many of these injuries result from:

- Not wearing a seatbelt.
- Riding a bike or motorcycle without a helmet.
- Drinking and driving.
- Riding with a drunk driver.

Drowning is the second leading cause of unintentional death in the United States. Drowning can occur in pools, lakes, and rivers and often occurs because a teen:

- Did not wear a life jacket.
- Participated in an activity without protective gear.

To prevent unintentional injuries, talk to your teen about basic **safety precautions**.

- Remind them often of how important it is to wear a seat belt and helmet, and model good behavior by always wearing one yourself.
- Talk to your teen about the dangers of drinking and driving. Reassure them that they can always call you or another responsible adult if they find themselves in a situation where their driver is drunk.

Violence

Violence affects the lives of many youth. Some of the risk factors for youth delinquency and violence include:

- **Abuse.** Children who have been physically or sexually abused are more likely than other children to become violent teens and adults.
- **Domestic violence.** Youth who witness domestic violence are more likely to use violence during their lifetime and are at greater risk for low self-esteem, depression, and substance abuse.
- **Poor role-modeling.** Parents who are involved in criminal activities or abuse drugs are more likely to have violent teens.
- **Bullying** and “dissing” are perceived by children, parents, teachers, and school administrators as major contributors to youth violence.

Violence of all types can result in severe injuries and even death. Highly associated with these injuries are **risk behaviors** such as¹¹:

- Physical fights.
- Carrying and using a weapon.
- Dating violence.
- Fighting.
- Forced sexual intercourse.
- Bullying.
- Making a suicide plan.

Adolescents who resist violence:

- Are more likely to report that they do not have access to a gun.
- Are protected because parents are home more frequently at key times of the day.
- Are protected by strong connections with families, schools, and friends.
- Are taught ways of dealing with conflict that don't involve violence.
- Grew up with structure and household rules.
- Received a lot of attention during infancy.
- Report that teachers treat them fairly, that they feel a part of the school, and that other kids are not prejudiced.

Mental Illness and Emotional Disturbance

Mental illness is a serious yet under-recognized health problem. An estimated one in every 10 youth in the United States between the ages of 9 and 17 have a diagnosable emotional or behavioral health disorder,¹² but less than a third get help for their problems. Mental health disorders in children and adolescents are caused by biologic and environmental factors. Examples of biological causes are genetics, chemical imbalances in the body, or damage to the central nervous system, such as a head injury. Environmental factors include:

- Exposure to environmental toxins, such as high levels of lead;
- Exposure to violence, such as witnessing or being the victim of physical or sexual abuse, drive-by shootings, muggings, or other disasters;
- Stress related to chronic poverty, discrimination, or other serious hardships; and
- The loss of important people through death, divorce, or broken relationships.

Finding help is critical

Your family can find the right services for your child if you:

- Get accurate information from hotlines, libraries, or other sources.
- Seek referrals from professionals.
- Ask questions about treatments and services.
- Talk to other families in your community.
- Find family network organizations.

Signs of Mental Health Disorders

Children and adolescents with mental health issues need to get help as soon as possible. A variety of signs may point to a mental health disorder or serious emotional disturbance, including:

- Sadness and hopelessness for no apparent reason, that doesn't go away.
- Very angry most of the time, crying, or overreacting to things, or chronic irritability.
- Feeling worthless or guilty often.
- Often anxious or worried.
- Unable to get over a loss or death of someone important.
- Extremely fearful.
- Constantly concerned about physical problems or appearance.
- Frightened that his or her mind either is controlled or out of control.
- Exhibits big changes, such as:
 - Declining performance in school.
 - Losing interest in things once enjoyed.
 - Unexplained changing in sleep or eating patterns.
 - Avoiding friends or family, wanting to be alone all the time.
 - Daydreaming too much; not completing tasks.
 - Feeling life is too hard to handle.
 - Hearing voices that cannot be explained.
 - Experiences suicidal thoughts.
- Begins self-abusing or abusing others by:
 - Using alcohol or other drugs.
 - Eating large amounts of food, then purging, or using laxatives to avoid weight gain.
 - Dieting or exercising obsessively.
 - Violating the rights of others or constantly breaking the law.
 - Setting fires.
 - Doing things that could be life-threatening.
 - Killing animals.

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. National Mental Health Information Center. Child and adolescent mental health. Available at: <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/CA-0004/default.asp>. Accessed on April 12, 2007.

Important messages about child and adolescent mental health:

- Every child's mental health is important.
- Many children have mental health problems.
- These problems are real, painful, and can be severe.
- Mental health problems can be recognized and treated.
- Caring families and communities working together can help.
- Information is available; call 1-800-789-2647 or visit <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov>.

Sexual Risk Behaviors and Unintended Pregnancy

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are spread through sexual contact with another person who is infected. Each year, approximately 4 million teens in the United States – about 1 in 4 sexually active teens – get an STI. Many STI's are curable. Other STI's have treatable symptoms, but cannot be cured. All infections are dangerous and introduce risk. For example, untreated STI's, with or without symptoms, put adolescents at increased risk for HIV. Young women affected by STI's, such as gonorrhea and chlamydia, are two to five times more vulnerable to HIV infection than women without STI's.

STI's go untreated for three main reasons:

- Some STI's show no symptoms.
- Long-term diseases such as sterility, pain, and certain cancers may not appear until years after the initial infection.
- Even though STI's are one of the most common types of infection in the United States, there is often shame and embarrassment about STI's, so parents, adolescents, and healthcare providers don't talk about them.

Unintended pregnancy is another risk factor associated with adolescent sexual activity and unprotected sex. Teen pregnancy poses a serious health risk for both the teen and the baby; teen pregnancy also causes social and financial problems for families. Compared to their peers who have children later, teen parents are:

- More likely to have low-birthweight babies who will suffer from poor health and development.
- More likely to have low family incomes, live in poverty, and receive public assistance.
- At increased risk of substance abuse, intimate partner violence, maternal depression, and divorce or separation.

Talk to your child about the risks of unprotected sex and make sure they know what to do in order to protect themselves from STIs and unintended pregnancy. If you are uncomfortable talking to your child about sex, ask your healthcare provider or a trusted family member or friend to help you.

Family Resources on the Web

The internet can help you find healthcare information for you and your family on adolescent health issues. Click on the links below to begin your search.

Healthy Lifestyles

My Pyramid: Steps to a Healthier You can help you learn about adolescent nutrition and ways to encourage your teen to eat healthfully:

Physical Activity for Everyone includes ideas on how to get your teen interested in physical activity and fitness: <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/physical/everyone.htm>

The *American Heart Association* provides creative ideas for getting kids and teenagers engaged in physical fitness and healthy lifestyles:

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=3028650>

The *American Cancer Society* provides information for families on tobacco use and tobacco cessation: http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/ped_10.asp

The *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* has developed a set of fact sheets on youth violence and violence prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/YVP/default.htm>

The *Nemours Foundation* provides information on eating disorders: http://kidshealth.org/teen/food_fitness/problems/friend_eating_disorder.html and information specifically designed for teenagers on body changes: http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_body/

Planned Parenthood provides information for adolescents and their parents on sexually transmitted infections: <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/sexual-health/stis-stds-101.htm>. Planned Parenthood also hosts *TeenWire*, a website devoted to teen sexual health. This site includes information on STIs, pregnancy, sexual violence, healthy relationships, and many other issues: <http://www.teenwire.com/>

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

The *Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health* is a family-run organization dedicated exclusively to helping children with mental health needs and their families achieve a better quality of life: www.ffcmh.org/

NAMI (the National Alliance on Mental Illness) is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to improving the lives of persons living with serious mental illness and their families. Their website includes information on child and adolescent mental health as well as links for support groups: www.nami.org

The *National Institute of Mental Health* also provides information on child and adolescent mental health: www.nimh.nih.gov or www.nimh.nih.gov/publica/pubListing.cfm?dID=23

The *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration* provides information on mental illness and substance abuse, treatment options, and prevention opportunities: www.samhsa.gov

- A Family Guide to Keeping Youth Mentally Healthy and Drug Free
- www.samhsa.gov/centers/clearinghouse/clearinghouses.html
- SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center
- <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov>

Stop Bullying Now is a website with resources on bullying: www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/

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