

Early Teen Years

(11 - 14 years old)



Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

TIPS FOR TAKING CARE OF YOUR TEEN

PARENTING

- There are many things you can do as a parent to help your teen grow up healthy and well adjusted:
 - Give him lots of love and care.
 - Set fair but firm rules.
 - Enforce the rules each time it is needed.
 - Teach your child to be responsible for his actions and to respect others.
 - Teach him your family values and the difference between right and wrong.
- Even though your teen may not respond to you, he wants and needs your love and praise. Hug him, and tell him that you love him often. Tell him when he does something that pleases you. Thank him when he does something nice.
- Talk with your teen often. Let him know you are willing to listen, even if you do not always agree with him.
- Talk with your teen each day about what happened at school and about his friends. Be positive, and support your teen.
 - Make sure he completes any homework.
 - Stay in touch with teachers, and ask for updates on your teen's progress.
 - When you talk with him:
 - Make eye contact.
 - Stop everything else, and just listen.
 - Give him your full attention.
 - Look for body language clues in addition to the words your teen speaks.
 - Help him find an answer to his problem or concern.
- Give your teen regular jobs around the house, such as helping to prepare meals and cleaning his room. Have him help with care of pets.
- Provide chances for your teen to be involved with things you approve of, such as sports or clubs at school or church. Support him in his interests with your time, and help as needed.
- Know where your teen is at all times, even when he is just "hanging out" with friends. Get to know his friends and their families.
- Teens often want to push the limits of what they are allowed to do. They do not like to be told what to do. Set firm but fair rules for your teen. Set a good example of how you want him to behave.
 - Set clear limits and consequences for his actions.
 - If he does not listen, take a privilege away, such as going to the movies with friends.
 - Be consistent. Only make rules that you can carry out. If you say you are going to do something, do it.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Early Teen Years, continued

DEVELOPMENT

- Your teen is learning to be independent and think for himself. Friends are very important at this age, often more important than parents or family.
- Help your teen learn to make good decisions. Help him learn to avoid pressure from his friends and how to decide what the right thing is to do.
- Give your teen an allowance for chores he does around the house. Teach him how to save money for something he wants in the future.
- Talk with your teen about TV and movie choices and how they fit in with your family values.
- Do not allow a TV set in his bedroom.
- Supervise what your teen does on the computer, cell phone and all other electronic devices. Place the computer in a common room.

EMOTIONS

- The teen years are a time of rapid change.
 - Your teen may not understand what is happening to him or why he feels a certain way.
 - Teens can sometimes be moody, frustrated or short-tempered.
 - Talk with your teen, and tell him that you are always there for him. Help him find ways to deal with these new feelings.
 - Avoid nagging and criticism as much as possible.
- Watch for signs of stress or depression, such as:
 - Sudden lack of interest in school or friends
 - Poor grades
 - Physical complaints that occur over and over, such as stomachaches or headaches
 - Poor behavior

BODY CHANGES AND SEXUALITY

- Talk with your teen about changes that are occurring with his or her body. Teens are often self-conscious about the way they look.
 - If you have a daughter, talk with her about menstrual periods. Help her cope with changes in her breasts and growth of pubic hair.
 - If you have a son, talk with him about changes in his voice, penis and growth of pubic and body hair.
 - Help your teen deal with acne. There are many over-the-counter and prescription medicines that can help.
 - Teach your teen to avoid tanning salons.
- Your teen may ask questions about sex. Be open and honest. Provide simple answers. Make sure your teen knows that he can come to you with his questions. Talk with your teen about dating, abstinence, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, homosexuality, rape and safe sex.

SAFETY

- Smoking
 - Do not smoke at home or in the car.
 - Teach your teen not to smoke. Keep him away from cigarette smoke. Breathing in secondhand smoke can cause asthma, ear infections and other breathing problems.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Early Teen Years, continued

- Home
 - Teach your teen how to answer the phone and how to be safe when he is home alone. Teach him not to open the door for a stranger.
 - Keep guns and bullets locked up and out of reach.
 - Teach your teen how to use the stove safely.
- Car
 - Make sure your teen always wears a seatbelt. Children and teens under 13 years old must ride in the backseat of a car.
 - Wear your seatbelt, too.
 - Teach your teen not to get in a car when the driver has been drinking or using drugs.
- Sports
 - Make sure your teen wears a bike helmet each time he rides.
 - Have him wear a helmet and safety gear for other sports, such as skateboarding and roller skating.
 - Make sure your teen drinks water often during the day, especially on warm days. Do not let thirst be a guide. A thirsty person is already dehydrated (dried out).
 - Teach him to drink water before he begins exercise and then every 15 to 20 minutes during exercise.
 - Sport drinks are also okay but should not be used in place of water.
 - Teach your teen to use sunscreen each time he plays or swims outdoors during the day.

HEALTHY EATING

- Keep meal time pleasant. Share news of the day, and talk together. Focus on family news and not on what or how much your teen is eating.
- Provide regular meal times and snack times for your family.
- Your teen may enjoy helping to plan and prepare meals. Talk with your teen about healthy eating and how it can help him as he grows.
- Your teen may enjoy growing a garden, shopping and helping you cook.
- Choose what foods will be served at meals and as snacks.
 - Allow your teen to choose what to eat from the food you provide.
 - Let him choose how much he wants to eat.
- Do not scold or nag him about what he eats or does not eat. Your teen will be eating outside of your home more often now. You will not always be around to know what he eats. Talk with your teen about food choices and how the food he eats matters to his health.
- Your teen's doctor may also advise that you give him a multivitamin each day.

Meals

- Your teen needs food from all food groups:
 - Lean meat, eggs, beans and cheese for protein
 - Fruits and vegetables for fiber, vitamins and minerals
 - Whole grains, such as cereal, pasta and whole grain bread for fiber, vitamins and minerals. At least half of the grains he eats should be whole grains.
 - Dairy foods, such as milk, cheese and yogurt for calcium.
- Fill half your teen's plate with fruits and vegetables.
- Limit fast food meals and snacks. These foods add lots of fat, sugar, salt and calories but little nutrition.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Early Teen Years, continued

- If your teen takes a lunch to school:
 - Pack him foods from each of the food groups. Or let your teen pack his lunch.
 - Freeze a water bottle, and add it to the lunch box to keep foods cold.
- When eating out, teach your teen to make healthy choices, such as:
 - Baked, broiled, grilled or roasted fish and meats
 - Roasted, baked or steamed potatoes or vegetables instead of French fries
 - A fresh, green salad or a fruit cup
 - Whole grain bread and buns instead of those made with white flour
 - Water and low-fat milk
 - Low-fat frozen yogurt with fruit for dessert

Snacks

- Give your teen healthy snacks, such as fruits, raisins, string cheese (cheese sticks), whole wheat crackers, rice cakes and graham crackers.
- Avoid foods with lots of sugar, such as desserts, sweetened cereals and candy. Candy and sticky, sweet foods can cause tooth decay.

Drinks

Give your teen low fat or skim milk.

HEALTHY HABITS

You can help keep your teen and your family healthy when you:

- Wash your hands often during the day. Teach your teen and other family members to wash their hands often, too. Use warm water and soap, and scrub for 20 seconds.
- Have your teen wash his face each day. Teach him to bathe regularly and wear deodorant.
- Teach your teen to brush his teeth with fluoride toothpaste each morning and at bedtime. Take him to the dentist for regular check-ups.
- Make sure your teen gets needed vaccines to help prevent disease.
- Make sure your teen gets enough sleep each night – 8 hours is good for a healthy mind and body.

Limit screen time to 1 or 2 hours a day. Some examples of screen time are:

- TV
 - Computers
 - Videogames
 - Tablet devices
 - Smart phones
-
- Avoid giving fruit punch and 100% fruit juice to your teen. It often has extra sugar he does not need. Try giving him pieces of whole fruit instead. If you do give him juice, only give your teen 4 to 6 ounces a day. Dilute it so it is 1/2 water and 1/2 juice.
 - Also avoid giving soda, sports drinks, energy drinks and sweet tea to your teen. Give water or diluted juice instead.
 - Your teen should have 1 hour or more of physical activity daily.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Early Teen Years, continued

For more information and tips on living a healthy lifestyle, you may go to www.strong4life.com.

FOR YOUR TEEN'S NEXT VISIT

- You and your teen's doctor can talk about how things are going with your teen.
- Your teen will have a physical examination (check-up) that may include getting vaccines.
- You will have a chance to ask questions.
- You may want to talk about your teen's:
 - Body changes
 - Eating habits
 - Concerns about discipline
 - School work, friends and social skills

THINGS FOR YOU TO DO

- Keep a record of when your teen is ill or hurt. Share this record with your teen's doctors.
- Make a list of questions to talk about with your teen's doctor at the next visit.
- Bring your teen's shot (vaccine) record to your next visit

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.