

ADOLESCENT CARE from 15 to 17 Years

Parents: Please remember, times today are different than when you were a teenager! Your teenager has many more and new obstacles to overcome than you did. In addition, they still are going through the same physical and emotional growth that you did. So bear with them. It can be a wonderful learning experience! AND have a sense of humor, it can take you far!

Females attain adult physical maturity during this time. It may be a little longer for males. Since sexual experimentation with peers and/or homosexual episodes may occur at this age, it is of utmost importance that adolescents have thorough sexual and reproductive knowledge including normal physical and psychological development, birth control and AIDS prevention. If you are uncomfortable talking with your adolescent about sex, then seek help through your health care provider or community.

Adolescents develop the ability to problem solve and think abstractly. Although this permits them to hypothesize about particular ideas, they are unable to think of themselves in a futuristic manner and are still egocentric with interests only in the here and now. This can present problems for their safety in that they think that "it can't happen to them." It also means that they are not always thinking of others and can be somewhat inconsiderate. Fortunately, this improves with age.

Sports activities remain very important in the life of an adolescent. Social activities often center around sports events and can be a means of meeting together in groups or pairs. Jobs after school and weekends can also be a part of an adolescent's life. This can be out of necessity or to provide extra income for car expenses or savings. One point to remember is that it shouldn't interfere with school.

Peer acceptance remains extremely important. The group sets the standards for behavior. Rejection can be devastating. One thing you can do is to listen to your child when situations occur that separate her from the group. You don't necessarily have to offer advice, just allow her to ventilate. Although it is often difficult for parents to accept or adjust to the variations in hair and clothing styles, try to be flexible.

Eating

Many adolescents seem to eat continuously! However, there are also many that consume an inadequate diet as well as those who are always "on a diet." The fact that many females are obsessed with physical appearance make this a worrisome problem for all concerned. It is important that your teen understand that genetics also plays a major role in determining body build.

Adolescents consume fast food daily and eat snacks that are high in calories and fat. Appropriate snacks should be encouraged and junk food consumed only in moderation. Continue to offer your child selections from the basic food groups at all meals and snacks. Teach her about foods. Of the major food groups, your teen needs: 4-6 servings of the milk, yogurt and cheese group; 2-3 servings of meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts group; 2-4 fruit servings; 3-5 vegetable servings; and 6-11 bread, cereal, rice and pasta group per day. At least one serving of fruit per day should be a citrus fruit or juice. A yellow or dark green vegetable should be served at least 3 to 4 times a week. A bread serving is one slice or a cup of cereal.

Avoid "empty" calorie snacks such as soft drinks, chips, candy, and cookies. If given, these should be in limited amounts. Encourage snacks of fruit, popcorn, peanut butter, stuffed celery, raisins, cheese strips, etc. It is important during this time to evaluate your teen's food consumption in relation to the amount of exercise that she does. While obesity is becoming quite worrisome in this age group, those adolescents participating in sports activities require an increase in calories.

Girls may also develop anemia during this time from a lack of sufficient iron in their diet to replace menstrual loss. Crash and fad dieting are common responses to the obsession with self-image and appearance. This may result in thinness. Like, obesity, eating disorders, such as bulimia or anorexia, are common during adolescence. If you need information on foods which are high in iron, appropriate dieting, or suspected eating disorder then consult with your health care provider.

Sleeping

While you may think that your adolescent "sleeps" her life away, (especially on weekends), in actuality many adolescents are frequently sleep deprived. Children this age require 8-9 hours, a night and sleep lost cannot be made up later.

Development/Play

By now you are very aware of how "social" your adolescent is! Even though the family is still important, friends (individuals, classmates, and group members) and their opinions are highly valued. Teens enjoy these interactions and spend a great deal of time with their peers. They will begin dating during this time.

School remains very important in your child's life now. Some subjects are enjoyed (as hopefully, are some teachers). Children this age are capable of problem solving and by middle adolescence may begin to think abstractly. They begin to show some concern for political and social problems by the end of this stage and are often idealistic and altruistic in intellectual capabilities. The adolescent may also begin activities that relate to a career choice for them later in life, or begin a part-time job.

Adolescents enjoy board, video and computer games, sports activities, crafts, sewing, music, art (and hopefully music or art studies), computers, video/audio equipment, and just "hanging out." Your child may join a club in your neighborhood or at school (band, chorus, service clubs) or enjoy an organized group such as scouts or a religious group. Team sports both in and out of school are good for channeling some of the boundless energy and teaching discipline. Support these kinds of activities in your community. Make sure your child's activities are properly supervised or chaperoned. Some teens enjoy reading, particularly book series, comics, or magazines appropriate for their age (consider subscribing to some). Others enjoy writing; encourage keeping a log or diary (maybe on the home computer). You may notice your child enjoys collecting things such as stamps or baseball cards or creating things like collages, building models, cooking. This a good time to help your child improve in her use of tools, utensils, and other household equipment.

Safety Dialogue and Discipline

It is important that the adolescent have increasing independence and freedom with appropriate limit setting for their safety and well-being. However, because there is a tendency toward risk taking, especially with peers, effective education regarding injury prevention must be taught. These areas should include: motor vehicles, water safety, sunburn, guns, sports injuries, drugs/alcohol, cigarettes/chewing tobacco, and sex and contraceptives. Encourage your adolescent to consider consequences **BEFORE** acting.

Effective education in the areas of sex, contraceptives, drugs/alcohol, and cigarettes/chewing tobacco is extremely important. AIDS prevention has magnified the importance of educating your child. It is appropriate and important to impart your own moral values about these subjects, but try to be flexible and open-minded enough to let your child ask questions and express feelings without fear of judgment or punishment. If you are just too uncomfortable to talk about these areas, make this known at an annual exam so your health care provider can help with this. Education such as this requires additional reinforcement from the school, the community, and other role models. This is an extremely difficult time for parents who must cope with their adolescent while trying to keep the channel of communication open. Try to love with no strings attached!!!

Do you know signs and symptoms of drug abuse or childhood depression? Ask for a handout on these subjects as well as those mentioned above.

Suggested Handouts, Readings & Videos

"Deciding to Wait"⁴, *No Easy Answers*³ video, *How Can I Tell if I'm Really in Love*, "Talking With Your Partner About Safer Sex" and "TWYPA Using Condoms" both ³, "Dating Violence" ³, "Sex? Let's Wait!" ³, "Smoking: Straight Talk for Teens"⁴, "Guidelines for Parent" series⁴ "How to talk to your children about AIDS"⁹

Additional Readings for Parents and Children

Caring for Your Adolescent by the American Academy of Pediatrics

What's Happening To My Body? Book for Boys by L. Madaras and D. Saavedra

What's Happening To My Body? Book for Girls by L. Madaras and A. Madaras

Straight from the Heart: How to Talk to Teenagers About Love and Sex by C. Cassell

Raising a Child Conservatively in a Sexually Permissive World by S. & J. Gordon

Crisis Proof Your Teenager by K. McCoy and C. Wibbelsman

Experts Advise Parents, ed. by E. Shiff

Parent/Teen Breakthrough: The Relationship Approach by M. Kirshenbaum and C. Foster

Positive Discipline for Teenagers by J. Nelsen and L. Lott



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