

Talking With Your Doctor

Follow these tips to get the most from your doctor visit.

If there's one word that best sums up the teen years, it's "change." Your body grows more between ages 13 and 19 than at any other point in life besides infancy. Think about it.

While change can be exciting, it also brings a range of questions. You may be confused about or troubled by acne, weight issues, or body changes. You may experience mood swings that can make you feel stressed, depressed, or like you're riding an emotional roller coaster. And you might face decisions that involve the use of substances such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs or activities such as sex, all of which can have serious consequences.

You might not realize it, but questions and issues you face as a teen are more related to your health than you might think. How do you sort it out? One of the best ways is to talk to your doctor. Here's a checklist to get the conversation started:

WRITE IT DOWN Keep a list of your questions and concerns, and bring them to your appointment. Consider keeping a health journal to record your daily moods and feelings. The more information you provide to your doctor, the better he or she will be able to help you. And remember, when it comes to your health, there are no dumb questions. *None.*

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GET THE FACTS Use your appointment as an opportunity to debunk myths and rumors about drugs, alcohol, and health in general. Ask how substance abuse might affect your body. Let your doctor know if drug addiction or alcoholism runs in your family. Ask how drugs and alcohol can affect medications prescribed for you or increase your chances of contracting certain diseases. Find out your personal risks. Want more information on a health topic? Ask your doctor for brochures, CDs, and other material that you can take with you.

GET IT OUT Let's face it. Talking about things like pimples, sexual development, or drug abuse isn't exactly fun. It's normal to be uncomfortable, but don't let embarrassment keep you from speaking up. Your doctor can't help you without knowing everything that's going on, including your feelings. Teens might not realize that negative feelings, including depression, often occur at the same time as alcohol and drug use.

Tip: A form from the American Medical Association can help teens compile personal facts about their health. To download this form, visit www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/1980.html. It's a great idea to fill out the questionnaire and bring it to your doctor visit. Most doctors give confidential time to teens and you can share it at this time with your doctor.

FOLLOW UP If your doctor has prescribed medications, be sure to ask questions about how to take your medicine properly. Make sure to schedule a follow-up appointment if necessary.

EMPOWER YOURSELF As a patient, you have a right to be an advocate for your health. This includes finding the right doctor. If you don't feel comfortable talking with your doctor, ask your parents about finding another health-care professional to speak with. Remember that it's OK to ask questions and expect answers, and it's always OK to get a second opinion.

When it comes to your health, talking to your doctor is a great way of getting the information you need to make smart choices regarding drug abuse and other important health issues. The more you know about your body, the more you can be in control of your health—and your life.

Listening to Teens: A Doctor's Viewpoint

When a teen patient goes for a physical with Dr. Norman Wetterau, a family physician and expert on substance abuse in upstate New York, Dr. Wetterau asks him or her to fill out a confidential questionnaire. He uses this to get insight into issues teens may want to talk about.

"Teenagers are sort of forgotten," says Dr. Wetterau. "Some doctors feel like they have difficulty relating to teens. 'What are we going to say to them?' some doctors think. And I keep saying, why don't you learn from them? Why don't you listen to them?"



Dr. Wetterau finds that many teens who use and abuse drugs are emotionally hurting. "They're depressed, suicidal, maybe their parents have alcohol and drug problems. Sometimes when I listen to their stories, I want to weep. They should know that if they're getting upset they can see the doctor—before they get sick, before something worse happens."

Teen patients in Dr. Wetterau's office can talk to other health-care professionals besides the doctor if they'd like to. "I have a female physician's assistant some of my female patients talk to about their sexual concerns. There are nurse practitioners, too," says the doctor. "But, the most important thing for teen patients, I think, is to show them that you care."

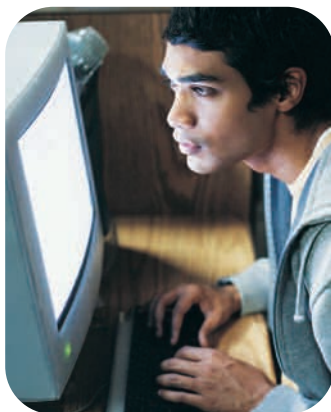
Getting Facts

Talking with your doctor is an important way to get information about drug abuse and health issues. A recent online event, **Drug Facts Chat Day**, sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, provided teens across the country with a chance to pose questions to the nation's top scientific experts about drugs.

“Does drinking at a young age make you more likely to become an alcoholic?”

“Can smoking casually still have bad effects on your body?”

“If you do drugs every day, when would you die?”



These are only a few of the more than **36,000 questions** teens put to a team of NIDA experts on October 12, 2007. To read a transcript of questions and answers from this event, visit:

www.drugabuse.gov/chat/2007

Getting Help for a Drug Problem

The best way for someone to stop using drugs is to get treatment from a doctor or a therapist. The sooner a person gets treatment, the better are his or her chances for recovery.

If you are in crisis and need to speak with someone immediately, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-TALK**—they don't just talk about suicide, they cover a lot of issues and will help put you in touch with someone in your area.

For more help, or to locate treatment centers, go to www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov, or call the national hotline at **1-800-662-HELP**.

Test Yourself

After reading the article “Talking With Your Doctor,” take this quiz. Check True or False for each statement. Answers are in the teacher's supplement.

1 Negative feelings, including depression, often occur at the same time as alcohol and drug use.

True

False

2 When you talk to a doctor, it's best not to ask too many questions, especially if they may sound dumb.

True

False

3 A doctor is the only person you can talk to about your health when you go for a medical appointment.

True

False

4 By sharing information with your doctor about drugs, alcohol, and health in general, you may be able to find out your personal risks.

True

False

5 Your body grows more between the ages of 13 and 19 than at any other point besides infancy.

True

False