

Teen Health: Talking with Your Doctor

— A message from Dr. Nora D. Volkow,
Director of NIDA



Dear Teacher:

As you know, life can get pretty complicated for teens given the range of physical and emotional changes they go through. Getting teens to talk about what's going on with them, especially with a doctor or another health-care professional, is crucial to keeping them healthy and safe from substance abuse.

This latest installment of *Heads Up* from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and Scholastic provides important information for teens on how to talk to doctors about sensitive medical and emotional issues, and to establish positive patterns for dealing with health issues in the future.

Talking with doctors and health-care professionals is crucial for teens dealing with a drug problem, and helps those who are not abusing drugs from starting. I urge you to share this *Heads Up* article with your students, and I thank you for working with NIDA to bring this important information about teen health to your class.

Sincerely,

Nora D. Volkow, M.D.
Director of NIDA



In This Installment

- Important information for teens on talking about personal health issues and drug abuse with doctors and other health-care professionals
- Guidelines for teens on recording personal health information
- Resources for teens in need of help with a drug problem

Reproducible

Use the Student Activity Reproducible on the back of this page as a guideline for students to create their own health journals.

More Information

- Downloadable teen health questionnaire:
www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/1980.html
- Transcript of "Drug Facts Chat Day" questions and answers:
www.drugabuse.gov/chat/2007
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-TALK
- Drug treatment centers in your area:
www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov
1-800-662-HELP
- More facts about drugs and your body:
www.scholastic.com/headsup
www.teens.drugabuse.gov

Lesson Plan & Reproducible

PREPARATION Make copies of the activity reproducible (on the other side of this page) for each student.

OBJECTIVE Students will learn that taking control of their own health includes developing effective relationships with doctors and other health-care professionals.

CONNECTIONS TO NATIONAL STANDARDS Life Work; Self-Regulation; Thinking and Reasoning

WHAT YOU WILL DO

- Introduce the topic of "talking with your doctor" by asking students to discuss a range of health-care issues that teens can face, such as acne, weight issues, eating disorders, smoking, drinking, drug abuse, depression, teen sex, and physical and emotional changes.
- Have students read the article "Talking With Your Doctor," then meet in small groups to discuss: *What kinds of health issues are the most difficult to talk about and why? What benefits could there be in talking*

to a doctor about these concerns? Discuss responses together as a class.

- After the discussion, hand out the reproducible. Review it with students and encourage them to start their own health journals to keep track of health issues.
- Refer students to the downloadable teen health questionnaire (see at left under "More Information"). The questions on this form can give teens additional ideas for information to keep track of in their journals.
- Encourage teens to talk with their doctors and other health-care professionals about their health issues.

ANSWERS TO "TEST YOURSELF" STATEMENTS IN THE STUDENT MAGAZINE:

1. True; 2. False; 3. False; 4. True; 5. True.

For printable past and current articles in the **HEADS UP** series, as well as activities and teaching support, go to www.drugabuse.gov/parent-teacher.html or www.scholastic.com/HEADSUP.

Name _____

Date _____

Creating a Personal Health Journal

Face it: As a teenager, you're going through more changes now than at any other period in your life outside of infancy. A personal health journal is a great way to keep track of all that's going on with you as you learn more about yourself and your health.

A health journal is great for recording things like:

- what's happening with your body, e.g., how you are feeling, symptoms, body changes.
- questions and/or concerns you have about your health.
- questions and/or concerns you have about health issues, such as drug abuse, alcohol and tobacco, and teen sex.
- your moods, feelings, and thoughts, and how you think they might be connected to your health.

While your journal is personal and private, it's helpful to refer to it to share facts when you visit your doctor or other health-care professionals. The more information you give your doctor, the better he or she will be able to help you. Also, as a patient, you have a right to ask questions that concern you; referring to a journal is a great way to cover your concerns.

Tips to Get You Started

GET A NOTEBOOK THAT SUITS YOU: Choose a notebook that you can carry comfortably. You might want to bring the journal to medical appointments to refer to when you talk with your doctor, or to use for taking notes during your visit. The journal can be especially helpful if you move, change doctors, or are hospitalized for any reason.

COMPILE YOUR VITALS: Write down as much of your medical history as you know. Ask your family and/or doctor for anything you're not sure about. Write down any medications/drugs you are currently taking, allergies, and any illnesses in your immediate family. There's a helpful form you can download at www.ama-assn.org/ama/upload/mm/39/periodic.pdf, which you can fill out and use for getting down the basics.

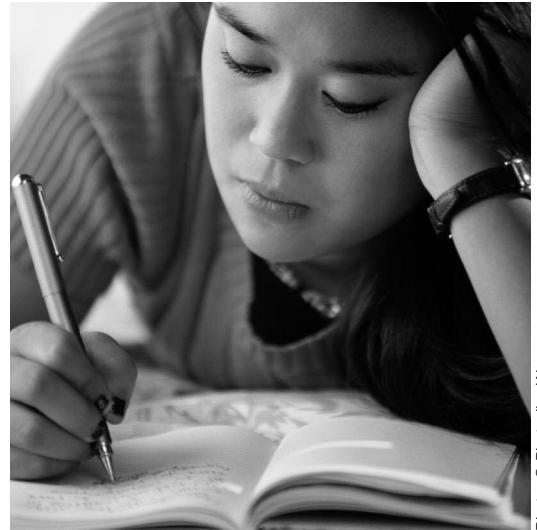


Photo: © Photodisc/Alamy.

GET IT OUT: Use the journal to record any questions and concerns about health issues, such as alcohol, tobacco, drugs, physical development, sex, eating or weight issues. Also write down any emotional issues you may be dealing with, such as problems at school, difficulties with family and friends, and anything you're concerned about.

NOTE CONNECTIONS between your health and your feelings.

UPDATE YOUR JOURNAL REGULARLY: Make sure you date your entries and also note the time of day.

KEEP TRACK of upcoming health appointments as well as follow-up doctor instructions. Use your journal to make notes of discussions with and advice from your doctor.