

Health and Wellness: 15 to 17 Years

Development

Your teenager should:

- be on track to graduate
- have a plan for after high school
- participate in activities outside of school, work or both
- participate in family activities
- help with chores
- spend time with friends in person.

Healthy Eating

- Encourage your teen to choose healthful snacks such as fruits, vegetables, yogurt, turkey, peanut butter sandwich, or cheese and whole grain crackers. Avoid processed foods as much as possible.
- Your teen should help with meal planning, preparation and clean up.
- Keep healthful foods and beverages on hand. Your teen should only be drinking milk or water. Discourage other beverages, including juice, soft drinks, sports and energy drinks. Limit sweets, treats and snack foods (such as chips), fast foods, and fried foods.
- Milk is an excellent source of calcium and vitamin D.
- Menstruating females need extra iron in their diet. Good sources of iron are lean beef, iron-fortified cereal or oatmeal, soybeans, spinach and tofu.

Physical Activity

- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends teenagers get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. This time can be spread throughout the day. Encourage your teen to participate in sports or other physical activities such as running, biking, martial arts, etc.
- Physical activity is important for physical and emotional development.

Sleep

- Teenagers need between 8 and 10 hours of sleep each night.
- Encourage your teen to go to bed early enough so that they get enough sleep and wakes up well rested for school.
- Turn off all screens at least 1 hour before bedtime. The bedroom should remain screen-free, including televisions, during sleeping hours. A digital alarm clock can be used as an alarm.

Safety

- Always wear a seat belt when driving or riding in a car. The lap belt must lie snugly across the upper thighs, not the stomach. The shoulder belt should lie snugly across the shoulder and chest and not across the neck or face.
- Do not talk or text on your cellphone while driving.

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- Your teen still needs to wear a helmet when biking, skating, etc.
- When your teen is outside, they should use sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15. Use a brand with the active ingredients titanium dioxide or zinc oxide. Avoid any that contain oxybenzone.
- Keep any prescription medicines out of view of your teen. Medicines should only be used by the person for whom they were prescribed. Expired medicines should be disposed of properly. Many teens who abuse prescription pain medicine get them from their medicine cabinets at home.
- If your teen does not know how to swim, enroll them in swimming lessons. Adult and teen classes are available.
- Talk about appropriate and inappropriate relationships with friends, classmates and adults. Teach your teen to establish personal boundaries and to say “no” if they are uncomfortable.
- Keep all knives, guns or other weapons out of your teen’s reach. Lock and store guns and ammunition in separate locations.
- Do not let anyone smoke or vape in your house or car at any time.

What To Know About Screen Time

- Screen time includes watching television and using devices such as cellphones, video games, computers and other electronics.
- The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends setting consistent limits on screen times. Make sure screen time does not get in the way of sleeping, physical activity, homework and family time. Teen’s need screen-free playtime for social and emotional development.
- Keep bedrooms and mealtimes screen-free. Turn off all screens at least 1 hour before bedtime.

- Teach your teen about the importance of privacy and not sharing passwords or any personal information with anyone except parents. Parents should have access and passwords to all of their teen’s online accounts.
- Talk about the risks (sexting, bullying) and benefits of social media and set boundaries. Consider a written contract for use of social media, electronics and the internet.
- Remind your teen that once thoughts and images are shared on the internet, they are permanent.

What Your Teenager Needs

- Set aside time every day for completing homework during the school year and reading during the summer. This time should be free of television, texting and other distractions.
- This is an important time to stay connected with your teen. Spend time together. You will not always agree on things, so work together to solve problems.
- Talk about family responsibilities and how they change with age. Teens may have part-time jobs in addition to household responsibilities.
- Have clear family rules and expectations around curfews, academic performance, and with whom your teen spends time.
- Encourage your teen to make good decisions about choosing friends. It is also important for you to get to know their friends.
- Talk to your teen about the risks and dangers of using alcohol, drugs, smoking and vaping.
- Emphasize the importance of safe driving (not texting, not driving impaired). Talk about not accepting car rides from someone who may be drinking or doing drugs.
- Talk about sex in the context of your family values and expectations. Talking about sex does not make it more likely that your teen will start being sexual activity. The more open you are about these topics, the more likely your teen will come to you with questions and then make positive choices.

- If your teen is sexually active, they should use birth control. It is important to use condoms to help avoid getting or giving sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Your teen should be tested every year for chlamydia and may need to be tested for other infections as well. Your teen can talk to their health care provider about these topics.
- According to Minnesota state law, adolescents have the right to confidential health care for pregnancy and reproductive counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, sexually transmitted infections, and a hepatitis B vaccination.
- Your teen may have sexual feelings and attractions for others of the opposite sex, the same sex, or both. Support your teen as they go through puberty, develop a gender identity, and learn to manage romantic feelings.
- It is normal for older teens to have increasingly serious romantic relationships and be more independent from their parents.
- Your teen’s decision-making skills should be improving. Look for opportunities to let them make some decisions on their own but be available for help and advice.
- This is an age when mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders become increasingly common. Signs to be concerned about are if your teen’s grades drop or if they withdraw from family, friends, or activities they usually enjoy.

Dental Care

- Make regular dental appointments for cleanings and checkups. Your teen may need fluoride supplements if you have well water.
- Remind your teen to brush and floss their teeth when they wake up and before they go to bed.

Community and Health Information Resources

- **Healthy Children**
— healthychildren.org
- **Poison Control**
— 1-800-222-1222 or poison.org
- **Common Sense Media**
— commonsensemedia.org
- **Change to Chill**
— changetochill.org

Minnesota

- **MinnesotaHelp.info®**
— mnhelp.info
- **United Way**
— 211unitedway.org
— dial 211 or 651-291-0211

Wisconsin

- **211 Wisconsin**
— 211wisconsin.communityos.org
— dial 211 or 1-877-947-2211

Your Teenager’s Next Well Checkup

Your teen’s next well checkup will be in 1 year.

- Your teen may need a cholesterol screening. Talk about this with your health care provider.
- Your teen may need these vaccinations:
 - influenza
 - MCV4 (meningococcal conjugate vaccine, quadrivalent): age 16
 - meningococcal group B: age 16.

Information about the Vaccines For Children (VFC) program is available if your teen is eligible for the program. VFC is a federally funded program that offers vaccines at no cost.

Talk with your health care provider for giving acetaminophen (Tylenol®) after your teen’s immunizations.