Well Child Care at 11 and 12 Years

Nutrition

Good nutrition is very important for children at this age. They are growing rapidly.

The best way to help your child eat well is to have a healthy diet yourself and involve your child in meal planning. Ask your child for his thoughts about food. Preteens tend to have too much fat, cholesterol, salt, and sugar in their diets. Talk about the habits that lead to gaining too much weight, such as not enough exercise, skipping meals, drinking too many soft drinks, or eating a lot of high-calorie snacks and fast foods. Ask your child about when he eats, overeats, or craves certain foods. If your preteen is eating when not hungry, encourage him to do something else, such as exercising, reading, or working on a project to help him stop thinking about food.

Make sure that you serve plenty of fruits, vegetables and calcium-rich foods. Iron-rich foods such as meats, nuts, soy and iron-enriched cereals are important, especially for girls who have started having a menstrual period.

Development

Most girls and some boys are well into the rapid physical growth of adolescence. Ask your healthcare provider if you have questions about physical and emotional changes as your child matures.

Doing well in school is very important at this age. Your child should take responsibility for completing homework and achieving goals. Stay involved with your child’s schoolwork and be a cheerleader, rewarding efforts and praising what your child achieves.

Preteens have many questions about sex and need the facts. They need to learn about menstrual periods, erections, wet dreams, sexual intercourse, and relationships. Talk to 11 and 12 year olds about sex before girls get their first menstrual period or boys get their first wet dream, so they will know that these events are normal. If you are not comfortable talking with your child about sex, ask your healthcare provider for help.

It is also important to teach your child that sex should be tied to feelings of commitment, belonging, self-esteem, and love. Your child needs your advice.

Behavior Control

At this age, peer pressure can be hard to resist. Watch for signs of change in your child’s normal behavior, particularly behaviors that go against your family’s value system. To help prevent problems, try to get to know your child's friends and their parents. Talk with your child about drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.

Discuss how to make good choices in the company of friends. Children who are most successful at resisting negative peer pressure are those with a strong sense of who they are and the confidence to say no. Use your praise and attention when they do the right thing. Catch them being good. Your opinion matters to your preteen.
No one should bully and no one deserves to be bullied. There are different types of bullies. Physical bullies may hit, pinch, kick, shove, bite, or pull a victim’s hair. Verbal bullies may insult, start or spread rumors, tease, or make threats. Sexual bullies may make sexual comments, threaten, or touch in unwanted ways, such as snapping a bra strap. Cyber bullies use the Internet, cell phones, or other devices to send or post text or pictures meant to hurt or embarrass another person. Bullying can cause anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression. Some victims attempt suicide out of desperation, believing that no one will help them. Teach your child to talk with you, a teacher, or another adult if he is being bullied.

**Reading and Screen Time**

Preteens can get bored with simple characters or predictable stories. They are capable of more complex thought and are able to put themselves in another’s place. They can appreciate books with different points of view. Reading can inspire courage, compassion, and commitment. Talk with your child about what books he is reading, and what he thinks about what he read.

Limit screen time (TV, video games, computers, tablets, and cell phones) to no more than 1 or 2 hours a day. Encourage your child to participate in family games and other activities the rest of the time. Watch and discuss some programs with your preteen. Don’t put a TV in your child’s bedroom. Having a TV, computer, or video game in your child’s bedroom increases your child’s risk for obesity, sleep disorders, and attention problems. Children often want a cell phone at this age. Consider how mature your child is and how your child will use the phone. Cell phones can be distracting and keep your child from face-to-face communication. Cell phones can also expose your child to cyber bullying. If you decide to give your child a cell phone, set careful guidelines and monitor your child’s use of the phone.

**Dental Care**

Except for the 3rd molars (wisdom teeth), most preteens have all of their permanent teeth.

Your child should brush his teeth at least twice a day and floss once a day.

Your child should see a dentist every 6 months or as often as the dentist recommends.

**Safety Tips**

Accidents are the number one cause of deaths in children. Children like to take risks at this age and still need supervision.

**Car Safety**

Make sure that your child uses a lap and shoulder belt in the back seat of the car. Children under 13 should always ride in the back seat.

**Traffic and Bicycle Safety**

- If your child has a bicycle, make sure that it fits your child. Have your child stand over the bicycle. There should be 1 to 2 inches between your child and the top bar of a road bike, and 3 to 4 inches for a mountain bike.
- Your child and all family members should always ride with a bicycle helmet.
- Don’t allow your child to ride an all-terrain vehicle (ATV).

**Strangers**

- Discuss safety outside the home with your child.
- Make sure your child knows how to contact you at work.
- Remind your child never to take anything from or go anywhere with a stranger.

**Smoking**

Most smokers started smoking as teens. Your child may be trying to find a way to fit in with a group of friends, or think it’s a fun activity at parties. He may be curious about what it is like, or think it will help him relax. He may do it as a way to rebel. Preteens and teens are often not concerned with health problems...
smoking may cause later in life. It may be more helpful to talk about the bad effects that your child can see and feel now, such as:

- Cigarettes don’t smell good. The smell will get into your child’s clothes, room, hair, and breath.
- Smokers have to smoke outside (even when it’s cold), away from other people.
- Cigarettes cost a lot of money. An average smoker spends at least $1600 to $2000 a year on cigarettes. Your child can probably think of many other ways to spend their money.

Set a good example for your child. If you smoke, set a quit date and stop. Ask your healthcare provider for help in quitting. If you cannot quit, do NOT smoke in the house, car, or near children.

**Immunizations**

Immunizations protect your child against several serious, life-threatening diseases. These immunizations are recommended at 11 or 12 years of age:

- Tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (Tdap) shot
- Meningococcal conjugate (MCV) shot
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) shot (3 shots over 6 months)
- A flu shot every year

**Next Visit**

A routine checkup every year is recommended.

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References
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