HEALTH BASICS

Teen health

Teen health is the physical, emotional, and social well-being of adolescents.

WHAT IT IS
Health and well-being during adolescence

WHERE IT COMES UP
Checkups, school, sports, home, and personal decisions

WHY IT MATTERS
Supports healthy development and early recognition of concerns

WHAT IT IS NOT
Not a disease or diagnosis

WHO TO ASK
Primary care clinician, school nurse, or adolescent health service

HOW IT IS CHECKED
Checkups, screening questions, measurements, and relevant tests

Overview

Teen health means caring for your physical, emotional, and social well-being during adolescence. It is not a disease or diagnosis.

The teen years include puberty and growing independence. Your body, sleep pattern, emotions, relationships, and responsibilities may all change. These changes do not happen at the same speed for everyone.

Health care during adolescence is not limited to treating illness. Routine visits can cover growth, vaccinations, sleep, nutrition, movement, mental health, relationships, sexual health, substance use, dental care, and safety. The topics discussed should reflect your age, circumstances, and concerns.

Part of a visit may take place without a parent or caregiver in the room. This gives you a chance to ask private questions. Confidentiality rules differ by location. A clinician may need to share information if there is an immediate safety risk, suspected abuse, or another legal requirement. You can ask what will remain private before discussing a sensitive issue.

How it works

Adolescence is a stage between childhood and adulthood. Puberty is one part of it. Hormones act as chemical messengers that guide physical changes, including growth, body hair, skin changes, breast or genital development, and menstrual periods for some people.

The brain is also still developing. Skills such as planning, managing emotions, and weighing long-term effects continue to mature. This does not mean teens cannot make sound decisions. It helps explain why practice, support, and clear information remain important.

Sleep timing often shifts during adolescence, making it easier to stay awake later. School, work, activities, screen use, stress, and early schedules can make it difficult to get enough sleep. Regular sleep supports learning, mood, attention, and physical health.

Relationships become more independent and complex. Friends, family, school, culture, gender, sexuality, disability, money, housing, and online experiences can all affect health. A supportive environment can make it easier to seek help and make informed choices.

Routine health care looks at the whole picture. Depending on your age and circumstances, a visit may include:

There is no single test for "teen health." Screening questionnaires can identify issues that deserve a closer look, but they do not always provide a diagnosis by themselves.

- Height, weight, blood pressure, vision, or hearing checks
- Questions about mood, sleep, school, relationships, and safety
- A review of vaccinations, medicines, allergies, and family history
- Discussion of periods, sexual health, alcohol, nicotine, or other drugs
- Tests offered because of symptoms, health history, sexual activity, or local guidance

Why it matters for your health

Habits and support during adolescence can affect health now and later. This includes sleep, food, movement, dental care, safer travel, and how you respond to stress. The goal is not to achieve perfect habits. Small, realistic changes can still be useful.

Routine visits create a place to ask questions that may be difficult to raise elsewhere. You can ask about puberty, acne, periods, body image, sexual feelings, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, mood, attention, eating, or substance use. These are health questions, not reasons for shame.

Vaccination is another part of preventive care. Which vaccines are offered depends on your age, earlier vaccination record, health conditions, location, and current public health guidance.

Keeping a copy of your vaccination record can prevent missed or repeated doses.

Emotional health matters as much as physical health. Stress, sadness, worry, irritability, and conflict can happen without being a mental health disorder. When feelings are intense, last for a while, or interfere with daily life, discussing them can help identify whether more support is needed.

What can go wrong

Teen health itself does not cause problems. However, adolescence is a time when certain conditions or difficult situations may first appear or become easier to notice.

These can include depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, substance use disorders, sleep disorders, asthma, migraine, persistent acne, anemia, and menstrual problems. Injuries, bullying, abuse, unsafe relationships, housing insecurity, and discrimination can also affect health.

Changes worth discussing at a routine appointment include ongoing low mood or worry, repeated headaches, persistent tiredness, major sleep problems, frequent pain, periods that cause concern, changes in eating, difficulty concentrating, or falling behind at school. A routine appointment is also appropriate if you have questions about puberty, sexuality, contraception, substance use, or confidentiality.

Some situations need urgent help rather than waiting for a routine visit. Seek urgent medical advice for a rapidly worsening health problem, serious injury, signs of dehydration, or symptoms after taking an unknown substance.

Contact emergency services now if you or someone else:

If possible, tell a trusted adult and stay with the person until help arrives. A local crisis service can also help when there are thoughts of suicide or immediate concerns about safety.

- Is in immediate danger or has a plan to attempt suicide
- Has severe trouble breathing, collapses, or cannot be awakened
- Has taken a potentially dangerous overdose
- Has uncontrolled bleeding or a severe injury
- Is experiencing violence or cannot get to a safe place

What you can do

You do not need to monitor every part of your development or arrange tests without a reason. Routine preventive care and attention to concerns are usually the practical starting points.

Before a health visit, write down what you want to discuss. You can bring a list on paper or on your phone. Include medicines, supplements, allergies, previous health conditions, and relevant family health history.

Useful records may include:

Ask which parts of the visit are confidential. You can also request time to speak with the clinician alone. If you do not understand a medical term, ask for a plain-language explanation.

There is no universal set of tests that every teenager needs. Blood pressure and growth measurements are common parts of checkups. Other tests, including blood tests or tests for sexually transmitted infections, are based on your history, symptoms, choices, and local recommendations. Ask what a proposed test checks for and what its result could change.

If something feels wrong, you do not need to wait until it becomes severe. Speak with a parent, caregiver, school nurse, counsellor, primary care clinician, or adolescent health service. If the first person does not understand your concern, it is reasonable to ask someone else.

- Your vaccination history
- The dates and general pattern of menstrual periods, if relevant
- Symptoms, when they happen, and what affects them
- Medicines and supplements you take
- Changes in sleep, mood, eating, school, or activity

Common questions

Is puberty supposed to happen at the same age for everyone?

No. The timing and order of changes differ between people. If development seems unusually early, late, painful, or worrying to you, a clinician can review your growth and health history.

Can I see a clinician without my parent in the room?

Many services offer private time with teenagers. Exactly what you can consent to and what remains confidential is set by local law and clinic policy. Ask the service to explain its rules.

Do I need blood tests at every checkup?

No. There is no routine blood test that measures overall teen health. Testing is selected for a specific reason, such as symptoms, a health condition, family history, medication monitoring, or an identified risk.

What if I feel uncomfortable discussing a topic?

You can start by saying that you have a private or difficult question. Writing it down may be easier. You can ask who will see the information before sharing details.

Are mood changes always part of being a teenager?

Emotions can change during adolescence, but persistent distress should not automatically be dismissed. Seek routine support if mood changes interfere with sleep, school, relationships, eating, or daily activities. Immediate danger or plans for suicide require emergency help.

Sources

- World Health Organization: Adolescent and young adult health
- American Academy of Pediatrics: Bright Futures Periodicity Schedule
- American Academy of Pediatrics: Confidentiality in the Care of Adolescents-Policy Statement
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Adolescent and School Health
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Child and Adolescent Immunization Schedule
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Population Affairs: Adolescent Health