

# Mendon Pediatrics

## Points for Parents

### Teenage Growth and Development: 15 - 17 years

*Congratulations! You and your teen have made it through what is usually the most difficult period of adolescence—11 to 14 years. Midadolescence (15-17 years) is usually an easier time for teens and parents. But don't get too comfortable. New challenges will test your patience, understanding, and parenting skills.*

#### Quick Facts

Most teens navigate the developmental tasks of adolescence successfully.

Teens ages 15-19 have much higher mortality rates than younger children.

The leading causes of death for teens are motor vehicle crashes, homicide, and suicide.

#### **Physical Growth**

Girls have usually reached full physical development. Many teenage girls are concerned with the way they look and are dissatisfied with their bodies and their weight. Nearly half of all high school girls diet to lose weight. Boys are close to completing their physical growth. Around 15 or 16 years of age, boys' voices will lower and facial hair will appear. Boys may continue to gain height and muscle.

#### **Intellectual Characteristics**

- Teens are better able to solve problems, think about their future, appreciate opinions of other, and understand the long-term effects of their decisions. However, teens tend to use these skills inconsistently; as a result, they sometimes do things without thinking first.
- Teens' organizational skills improve. Many successfully juggle school, outside activities, and work.
- In an attempt to answer the questions "Who am I?" and "What should I be?" teens listen to new music, try out clothing fashions, and begin to explore jobs, religion, political issues, and social causes.
- Teens frequently question and challenge school and parental rules.

#### **Social and emotional characteristics**

- Older teens are more self-assured and better able to resist peer pressure than younger teens.
- Teens spend less time than they used to with their families. They prefer to spend more time with friends or alone.
- Teens try to make close friends and may become part of a group based on interests or attributes (sports, arts, etc.).
- Teens want control over more aspects of their lives.
- Teens are excited and at the same time overwhelmed by the possibilities for their future (college, work, or military).
- Like adults, teens get depressed—sadness lasting more than 2 weeks, however, is not normal. Call your teen's health care provider if this happens.

- Use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs is more common now than before.
- Teens begin to have strong sexual urges, and many become sexually active.
- Teens become more aware of their sexual orientation (homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual).

### Tips for Parents

- Breaking away from parents or guardians and wanting more privacy are normal parts of growing up—don't take it personally.
- Although they won't admit it, teens still need parents to set limits. Rules and privileges (curfew, driving, dating, etc.) should be based on your teen's level of maturity, not age.
- Negotiate rules with your teen. The more controlling you try to be, the more rebellious your teen is likely to become.
- Discuss consequences of breaking the rules and follow through with them if your teen misbehaves.
- Teens will make mistakes and may lose your trust. It's important to give them another chance.
- Express your values about school, work, alcohol and other drugs, and sex.
- Encourage your teen to take aptitude and interest tests at school to identify future directions. Help your teen plan for his or her future after high school.
- If your teen tells you that he or she is homosexual, he or she will need your love and support. You, in turn, may benefit from a support group for parents of gays and lesbians.
- Know how to recognize the signs and symptoms of eating disorders and other mental health problems. Deal with any problem right away.
- Talk with your teen about ways to handle pressure to drink, smoke, have sex, etc. Teach your teen how to say no and to suggest doing something different (safe). To feel comfortable talking openly with you, your teen needs to know that you will not punish him or her for being honest.

### Resources

Adolescent Health On Line <http://www.ama-assn.org/go/adolescenthealth>

Learning Network Parent Channel <http://www.familyeducation.com>

National Parent Information Network <http://www.ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin>

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry <http://www.aacap.org>

*Caring for Your Adolescent Ages 12 to 21*, The American Academy of Pediatrics

*Beyond the Big Talk: Every Parent's Guide to Raising Sexually Healthy Teens*, Debra Haffner

*It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex & Sexual Health*, Robie Harris

*Teen Tips: A Practical Survival Guide for Parents with Kids 11 to 19*, Tom McMahon

*You and Your Adolescent: A Parent's Guide for Ages 10-20*, Levine Steinberg

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