

## Health Care for the Young Adult

### *What your Pediatrician Wants You to Know*

After high school most young adults go to college, other secondary education, work full-time, or do some combination of school and work. New changes in the health care laws allow young adults to stay on their parent's insurance until age 26.

At Parker Pediatrics we want you to know that we can continue being your primary care doctor until age 21. The new health care guidelines recommend yearly physicals until that age. We can also treat acute problems and provide ongoing treatment for chronic problems, such as acne and asthma.

If you are starting college, or the work force, you should realize that you are now in charge of your health and wellbeing. You should make sure you have health insurance whether or not you are staying on your parent's health plan. You should carry an insurance card. You should get a copy of your immunization records, know which medications you take, and if you are allergic to any medications.

There are many basic steps you can take to stay healthy:

1. **Get plenty of rest;** eight to nine hours are recommended.
2. **Eat well,** especially watch your intake of junk food. Make sure you eat fruits and vegetables daily and have three servings of calcium rich foods, such as yogurt, milk, or cheese.
3. **Exercise** – Luckily walking counts! You should exercise an average of one hour per day minimum. It is also good to do some stretching and strengthening, such as weight lifting exercises, on a daily or routine basis.
4. **Sexual health.** Between the ages of 15 and 25 most people become sexually active. Waiting until you are ready and prepared for this event in your life is a good idea. Whenever this part of your life occurs, you should take care of yourself. Emotional commitment is a big part of sexual intimacy. Be sure you have thought through how you feel with this commitment. You should also make sure you prevent a pregnancy until you want to have children and you should take precautions against sexually transmitted diseases. The surest way to avoid sexually transmitted disease, such as AIDS (which can kill you), herpes, or venereal warts, is to abstain from sex, limit your partners, and to use latex condoms when having sex.  
  
If Parker Pediatrics has been prescribing your birth control pills, we now recommend that you establish a relationship with an OB-GYN physician to care for your ongoing gynecologic health.  
  
An OB-GYN is specially trained to provide comprehensive care for gynecologic problems throughout your late teen years into your 20s and 30s.
5. **Immunizations.** You should have completed your childhood immunizations by this age. You may be due for a tetanus booster. If you have not done so, you should consider getting the Gardasil vaccine, which can help prevent venereal warts (and prevent cervical cancer in women). This vaccine is also approved for men. After the age of 18, you may request or decline any shots – only you can decide which vaccines you need (with your pediatrician and parents as sources of information). You should have received your meningitis shot (Menactra) which can prevent one form of serious, fast-acting, bacterial meningitis.

## **Common Health Problems**

If you are moving out on your own or going to college, you should be aware of when to seek urgent medical attention:

1. A fever of 102.5° or higher
2. Headaches with fever and a stiff neck
3. Pain on urination
4. An unusual discharge from your penis or vagina
5. A change in your menstrual cycle
6. A pain in your abdomen that will not go away
7. A persistent cough, chest pain, or trouble breathing
8. Pain or any symptoms that worry you or last longer than you think they should

The following are items in a good first aid kit:

- Bandages for small cuts and scrapes
- Gauze and adhesive tape
- An elastic bandage for wrapping sprains
- Liquid soap
- Antibacterial/antibiotic ointment
- A digital (not mercury) thermometer
- An ice pack or chemical cold pack
- Medicine for an upset stomach
- Acetaminophen or ibuprofen for aches, pains, and fever
- Medicine for diarrhea
- Medicine for allergies
- Sore throat lozenges or spray

For minor bruises, sprains, or strains, we recommend RICE

- **Rest** for at least 24 hours.
- **Ice** packs or cold gel packs for 20 minutes every four hours.
- **Compression:** Wrap the injured body part with an elastic bandage.
- **Elevation:** keep the injured body part (i.e. ankle) higher than your heart.

## **Taking Care of Your Mental Health**

Friends are a major support group, especially as we leave home. Clubs and sports at college or recreation centers can help us make new friends.

Everyone has days when they feel down or stressed. It is important to have something to look forward to every day, whether a walk, a latte, or time with a favorite book. If you are sad or depressed, or have any of the following for more than two weeks, you should see a counselor right away.

- Sad mood
- Hopeless, helpless, worthless, or guilty feelings

- Loss of pleasure in things you usually enjoy
- Sleep problems
- Eating problems
- Low energy, extreme tiredness, or lack of concentration
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Physical symptoms, such as headaches, stomachaches, or body aches that do not respond to treatment

Do not think you can handle depression on your own. If one of your friends seems depressed, suggest that he/she see a counselor as soon as possible

## **Drinking, Addiction, and Violence**

Drinking is a huge problem on most college campuses and other groups of young adults. The majority of college students drink, and a large number drink to excess. More than half of all male college students are binge drinkers (those who have five or more drinks at one sitting), and more than one-third of female students are binge drinkers. Heavy or binge drinking can lead to physical illness (or death), long-term drinking problems, and aggression and violence. Drinking is known to increase sexual aggressiveness, which can lead to sexual harassment and date rape. Drinking also clouds your judgment and may make you more likely to engage in unsafe sexual practices, which may in turn lead to STDs and unintended pregnancies.

The legal drinking age in the United States is 21. The best way to prevent drinking-related problems is to avoid drinking altogether. If you are of legal age and choose to drink, be responsible. Stop after one or two drinks. **Do not** drink and drive, **do not** let friends drink and drive, and **do not** ride with someone who has been drinking. Follow the designated driver rule. Do not drink with people you do not know. If you feel you need to cut down on your drinking, if friends comment on the amount of drinking you do, or if you ever feel guilty about something you have done while drinking, see a counselor.

Entering young adulthood is an exciting, but scary, time in your life. Your family and your pediatrician are here to help you. Everybody make mistakes – just learn from them. Please feel free to ask us if you have any specific questions