

# 5 health tips for teens (age 13-17)

The teen years are exciting times. As you make the transition from child to teen, you'll take on new responsibilities, learn new skills, meet new friends, and make many decisions.

If you feel a little overwhelmed at times, remember that your family, doctor, health care team, and adults at school and in your community are all here to help. Talk to someone you trust. These 5 tips may help.

## 1. Focus on staying safe.

### Avoid violence

- Don't carry or use a weapon of any kind.
- Learn to solve conflicts without violence. Talk it over, or walk away.
- If you're being bullied, or physically or sexually abused, or you feel like you're in danger, ask a parent, teacher, or doctor for help.
- Don't participate in, or put up with, behavior that hurts other people.

**Use good sense on the road.** Crashes are the leading killer of teens.

- Always wear your seat belt, whether you're the driver or passenger.
- Drive carefully and use good judgment. Take a pledge not to text or talk on your cell phone while driving.
- Never drive buzzed, or ride with a driver who's been drinking or using drugs. Call a friend or family member for a ride.
- Always wear a helmet when you're on a motorcycle, bicycle, or skateboard.

**Avoid drugs and alcohol.** Drinking alcohol or using drugs puts you at greater risk of unplanned sex, and even sexual abuse.

- Stay away from places where people are using drugs or alcohol.
- Plan how you'll say no if you're offered alcohol or drugs.
- If you have questions or concerns about substance use, talk to your doctor (conversations are confidential), or an adult or peer counselor at your school.
- If you use drugs or alcohol and want to quit, call the Kaiser Permanente Adolescent Center or Kaiser Permanente Behavioral Health Services (phone numbers listed on the next page). Calls are confidential.

### Protect yourself on the internet.

- Don't share personal and financial information about yourself and your family on the internet.

- If anyone tries to bully or scare you, stop communicating with them right away.
- If you don't know someone, don't agree to meet them in person.
- Remember that things you post on social networking sites, such as Facebook, may stay there forever.

## 2. Make a habit of healthy choices.

- **Get some physical exercise every day.** It will help you feel better physically, mentally, and emotionally. Walking, riding a bike, shooting hoops, skateboarding, and inline skating are all great ways to be active.
- **Limit screen time.** Too much time on the computer, playing video games, and watching TV can lead to weight gain and other health problems.
- **Don't use tobacco.** It's expensive, it stains your teeth, and it makes you and your breath smell bad. If you use tobacco, quit. E-cigarettes (called vaping) are just as bad. They contain nicotine just like traditional cigarettes, which affects brain development. Protect yourself from other people's smoke. Ask them not to smoke around you or in your home or car.
- **Avoid loud music.** It can cause hearing loss. Keep the volume at the halfway mark or below, especially if you wear ear buds.
- **Get plenty of sleep.** Teens need between 8 and 10 hours of sleep every night. You'll probably find it easier to deal with life's challenges when you're well rested.
- **Take good care of your teeth.** Brush and floss your teeth every day. You'll keep your smile healthy, your teeth white, and your breath fresh.
- **Protect your skin from sun damage.** Use sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher) and wear a hat and sunglasses when you're outside during the day.
- **See your doctor every year.** An annual well-visit checkup is a chance to make sure you're getting the preventive care you need, and to talk to your doctor about your questions and concerns. Conversations with your doctor are confidential.

## 3. Eat well.

- **Choose a variety of healthy foods.** Try to eat 3 healthy meals a day, including breakfast. Aim for 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day. Good nutrition will help you function at your best.
- **Eat meals with your family** as often as you can.

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- **Limit the amount of junk food you eat.** The healthier your food, the better you'll feel.

#### 4. Don't ignore your feelings.

- **Remember that difficult feelings are normal** from time to time, like stress, anger, and low self-esteem.
- **Talk to a trusted adult or friend** about your feelings, and about anything else that's on your mind.
- **Watch for signs of depression.** They include:
  - Feeling angry, irritable, hopeless, or sad, or crying a lot
  - Lack energy or interest in friends and activities you used to enjoy
  - Trouble concentrating
  - Feeling like you're not good enough
  - Thinking about hurting or killing yourself or others
  - Having a hard time getting along with other people
  - Thinking about running away or dropping out of school

If you've had any of these symptoms for 2 weeks or longer, it could mean you're depressed, so get help right away. Depression can be treated. Teens who are depressed are at greater risk for getting sick, having problems in school, and getting in trouble with the law.

**5. Be smart about sexual issues.** Having sex can have consequences, so it helps to think ahead about what you do—and don't—want to do.

- **Remember that not having sex** (being abstinent) is the only sure way to protect yourself from unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases and infections (STDs and STIs), including HIV.
- **Be clear in your own mind about what you will and won't do.** Talk to your boyfriend or girlfriend about your limits before you get sexually excited.
- **Don't get talked into anything you don't want to do.** If you feel unsure about anything, say "NO."
- **Remember that the choice** of whether to have sex is a decision only you can make. If you decide not to have sex until you're older, you're not alone. Many teens make that choice.
- **If you need help making a decision,** talk with your parents or a trusted adult, such as your doctor.
- **If you decide to have sex:**
  - Protect yourself from STDs/STIs by using a condom every time for vaginal, anal, or oral sex.
  - Use a condom or dental dam to make oral and anal sex safer. Oral and anal sex can't cause pregnancy, but can lead to STDs/STIs.
  - For girls: Avoid unplanned pregnancy by using another form of birth control, like the pill Depo-Provera,

implant, or an IUD. If you have sexual intercourse without using protection, call your doctor or the Consulting Nurse Service right away to find out how to avoid unwanted pregnancy and STDs/STIs. The Consulting Nurse Service is available to Kaiser Permanente members 24/7.

- See your doctor for a check-up at least once a year. If you've been sexually active, ask your doctor to test you for common sexually transmitted infections, just to be on the safe side.

- **If you have questions about your sexuality or gender:**

- Remember that you're not alone. Many teens wonder whether they might be gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Some teens just aren't sure.
- Talk to someone you trust. Choose a person who can help you feel safe and accepted.

If you have any questions about gender or sexuality, including safe sex, sexual identity, and birth control, talk to your doctor. You can also talk to your doctor about anything else, such as problems at home or school, stress and depression, bullying, drugs, alcohol, and tobacco use. All conversations with your health care team are confidential.

#### Next wellness visit in 1 year

### Community resources for teens

Emergency Contraception: [not-2-late.com](http://not-2-late.com)

National Alcohol and Drugs Helpline: **1-800-662-HELP**

National Domestic Violence Hotline: **1-800-799-7233**  
[ndvh.org](http://ndvh.org)

National Runaway Safeline: **1-800-621-4000**

National STI Hotline: **1-800-227-8922**

Planned Parenthood's Teen page:  
[plannedparenthood.org/info-for-teens/](http://plannedparenthood.org/info-for-teens/)

Center for Young Women's Health:  
[youngwomenshealth.org](http://youngwomenshealth.org)

TeenLink (for teens in Western Washington):  
**206-461-4922, 1-866-833-6546**, or on the web at  
[www.866teenlink.org](http://www.866teenlink.org)

TeensHealth: [teenshealth.org/teen/](http://teenshealth.org/teen/)

### Kaiser Permanente resources

Adolescent Center: **1-800-422-7932, option 6** or **425-562-1350**

Behavioral Health Services: **1-888-287-2680**

Consulting Nurse Service, 24/7: **1-800-297-6877**

Website: Kaiser Permanente: [kp.org/wa](http://kp.org/wa) (type 'teen resources' in the search box).

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