

Tips for preteens (10 to 12 years) and their parents

Healthy eating

- Work together as a family to plan and prepare meals.
- Plan 3 nutritious meals and snacks every day, including breakfast either at home at school.
- Have pleasant conversations at mealtime with TV off.
- Aim for 5 servings of fruits and vegetables each day.
- Make sure foods include enough vitamin D and calcium. If unsure, take a multivitamin every day. Choose vitamins that don't have sugar.
- Avoid sweetened juice drinks and sodas, chips, and fast foods.

Healthy habits

- Be active every day. Aim for 60 minutes of physical activity most days of the week. Plan fun activities the family can do together.
- Limit screen time to one hour a day. Spending too much time in front of the TV or computer can lead to obesity and other health problems.
- Brush and floss your teeth every day and visit the dentist every 6 months.
- Learn and talk about the dangers of smoking, drinking alcohol, and taking drugs.
- Don't let anyone smoke around you or in your home or car. Secondhand smoke increases risk for asthma and pneumonia.
- Use sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher) and wear a hat and sunglasses when going out in the sun. Reapply sunscreen every 2 hours and buy new sunscreen every year.

Personal safety

- If there's a gun in your home, or the home of any friends, make sure it's kept unloaded and locked up.
- Set limits on what kinds of shows you watch, what kinds of electronic games you play, and which websites you visit. Viewing shows, games, and websites that have violent content can lead to an increase in violent behavior.
- Wear a helmet for all bicycle riding and skating (including skates, skate boards, and scooters). Add wrist guards, kneepads, and gloves for skateboarding and inline skating. Learn safety rules for riding bikes.
- Use lap and shoulder safety belt in back seat of car for every ride. Front seat passenger air bags can cause severe injury to people under 12 years old. Don't allow anyone to ride in back (cargo area) of a pickup truck, van, or station wagon.

- Install and check smoke detectors. Have a fire escape and disaster plan ready. Talk about these plans with the whole family.
- Keep number of Poison Control by the phone: **1-800-222-1222** (voice and TDD).
- Make sure someone is watching whenever you're playing in or near water. Knowing how to swim doesn't mean you're "drown-proof."
- Don't share personal information about yourself or your family over the internet. Never communicate with anyone who tries to bully or scare you, or invites you to meet them in person. Remember that things you post on social networking sites, such as Facebook, can stay there forever.
- Don't put up with behavior that hurts other people, such as bullying. If anyone you know is being bullied, take it seriously. Tell a trusted adult in your family, community, or school. Practice skills in dealing with bullies: try not to react, stay calm, and walk away.

Puberty

People enter puberty (sexual development) at different ages and develop at different rates. These changes can begin as early as 8 for girls and 10 for boys. Some people don't finish going through puberty until they're 16 or 17. This range is completely normal.

These are the body changes most people can expect at some point during these years:

Girls

- Breast development, 8-13 years old
- Pubic hair, 8-14 years old
- Growth spurt, 9½-14½ years old
- First period, 10-16½ years old

Boys

- Pubic hair, 10-18 years old
- Testicle growth, 10-18 years old
- Growth spurt, 10-17½ years old
- Penis growth, 10-17 years old

Continued next page

Personal changes

Puberty can be exciting and challenging for both kids and parents. During this time, preteens and teens take on some very important tasks on their journey toward independence.

Developing a new sense of self

- Noticing talents and weaknesses.
- Accepting body changes and wondering whether they're normal.
- Becoming more independent.
- Challenging parents' values.
- Wanting friends' advice, but needing parents' advice too.

Changing friendships

- Developing close friendships outside the family.
- Looking for ways to "fit in" with friends.
- Learning to solve problems between friends.
- Discovering sexual identity and romantic relationships.

Considering the future

- Planning for education or training after high school.
- Joining clubs and organizations.
- Thinking about work choices.

How parents can help

- Talk with your preteen. Remind them that you're there if they need to talk. Be a good listener. Try not to judge or criticize. If you're angry, say so (without yelling), and explain why.
- Treat your preteen with respect. Respect each other, support each other, and have fun together. Respect your children's privacy and ask them to respect yours.
- Let your preteen be an individual. Talking, dressing, and acting differently from adults helps preteens feel independent. Avoid criticizing clothing, hairstyle, music, or friends. When preteens are allowed to rebel in these areas, they are less likely to test you in other areas (such as using drugs, missing school, or shoplifting).
- Pick your fights. Although you must intervene when children do something harmful, dangerous, or illegal, try to let them do things their own way as often as you can. Children learn from trial and error.
- Have family meetings. Use this time to review safety rules for the home, including rules for having visitors. Make sure children know what to do and who to call in an emergency. Discuss consequences if rules are broken such as losing telephone, TV, or computer privileges or limiting outside activities.
- Talk about dating and sex. Talk with them about their feelings. Discuss physical and emotional risks of sex.

Explain your own moral beliefs, and what you hope they will do, but don't lecture.

- Discuss peer pressure. Talk to them about resisting pressure and making their own decisions. Teach them about the health risks of using alcohol, tobacco, and inhalants, and the danger of gangs.
- Involve yourself in your child's activities. Talk to them about what's going on at school. Show interest in their activities and friends. Get library cards and make trips to the library together. Discuss their thoughts about future education and training.
- Talk to other parents about your experiences, or to a counselor if times are difficult. Read books about preteen behavior.
- Be a good role model. Don't yell. Don't smoke cigarettes or use other tobacco products. Don't neglect your own health. Don't drive after drinking alcohol.

WEBSITES

- Kaiser Permanente: kp.org/wa
- American Academy of Pediatrics: aap.org
- NetSmartz Workshop: www.netsmartz.org/internetSafety
- Talking with Kids about Tough Issues: www.talkingwithkids.org
- Striving to Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere: www.safeyouth.gov

SUGGESTED READING FOR PRETEENS

- *Growing and Changing: A Handbook for Preteens*, McCoy & Wibbelsman
- *What's Happening to Me?*, Mayle
- *What's Happening to My Body? Book for Boys: A Growing Up Guide for Preteens and Teens*, and accompanying workbook, *My Body, My Self for Boys*, Madaras
- *What's Happening to My Body? Book for Girls: A Growing Up Guide for Preteens and Teens*, and accompanying workbook, *My Body, My Self for Girls*, Madaras

SUGGESTED READING FOR PARENTS

- *Caring for Your Teenager*, Bashe and Greydanus
- *Stop Treating Me Like a Kid! Everyday Parenting*, Goldstein, et al.
- *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*, Faber & Mazlish

Next well-child visit in 1 year

Content adapted and used with permission from The Permanente Medical Group Inc., Northern California Regional Health Education.