



What to Expect as Your Child Grows: Well Child Care at 11-12 Years

Nutrition

- Nutrition is very important for children at this age. They are growing rapidly and require lots of calories.
- The best way to get your children to eat well is to be a role model and to get them involved in meal planning. Adolescents tend to have too much fat, cholesterol, salt, and sugar in their diets. Purchase plenty of fruits, vegetables, and calcium-rich foods. Iron-rich foods (especially meats, nuts, soy, and iron-enriched cereals) are important, especially for menstruating girls. Children often gain too much weight from overeating high-calorie snacks and fast foods, drinking too much soda and juice, and not getting enough exercise. Your healthcare provider should check your child's weight at least once per year.
- Ask your children for their thoughts on the best way to prepare foods, how they perceive their body, and the amount of activity they need for good health. Have open-ended conversations about the habits that lead to gaining too much weight such as not exercising enough, skipping meals, drinking too many soft drinks, and eating a lot of fast food. If your pre-teens are eating when not hungry or bored, encourage them to do something else, such as exercising, reading, or working on a project to stop thinking about food.

Development

- Most girls and some boys are well into rapid physical growth of adolescence. Ask your healthcare provider if you have specific questions about your children's physical and emotional changes as they mature.
- School achievement is very important at this age. Pre-teens should take responsibility for completing their homework and achieving goals. Each child has different skills and limitations. Stay involved with your child's schoolwork, and be a cheerleader, rewarding efforts and achievements with praise.
- Pre-teens have many questions about sex and they need the facts. They need to learn about menstrual periods, erections, wet dreams, sexual intercourse, and relationships. It's important for parents to talk to their daughters about menstrual periods and their sons about wet dreams so they'll know these events are normal. If you are not comfortable talking with your child, ask your healthcare provider for help.
- It is also important to teach your child that sex should involve human feelings, such as commitment, belonging, self-esteem, and love. Pre-teens need your advice.

Behavior and Discipline

- Parents play an important role in the life of a pre-teen. Despite the attention given to popular culture heroes, role-modeling by parents is very important. Involvement by adults of both genders is best.
- At this age, peer pressure can be hard to resist. Watch for signs of changes in your child's normal behaviors that go against the family's value system. To prevent problems, try to get to know your child's friends and their parents. Children who are most successful at resisting negative peer pressure are those with a strong self concept who have the confidence to say "No." Discuss with your pre-teen how to make good choices in the company of friends. Use your praise and attention when your children do the right thing. Catch them being good.

Media

- Pre-teens can get bored with simple characters or predictable stories. They are capable of more complex thought and are able to put themselves in another's place. They can appreciate books that highlight different points of view. Reading can inspire courage, compassion, and commitment. Talk with your child at every opportunity about the books your children are reading, and what they think about what they have read.
- Encourage your child to participate in family games and outdoor activities. Limit "screen" time. Watch some programs with your pre-teen and discuss the program. Television, electronic games, and computers in your child's bedroom are strongly discouraged as these are associated with increases in body weight. To reinforce this, fairness is advisable. No one at home should have these items in the bedroom.

Safety Tips

- Accidents are the number one cause of death in children.
- Kids like to take risks at this age but are not well prepared to judge the degree of those risks. Therefore, eleven- and twelve-year-olds still need supervision. Parents should model safe choices.
- **Car Safety**
 - Everyone in a car should always wear seat belts.
- **Pedestrian Safety**
 - Make sure your child always uses a bicycle helmet. You can set a good example by always wearing one too.
 - Talk to your child about riding on busy streets.
 - Don't buy a bicycle that is too big for your child.
- **Strangers**
 - Discuss safety outside the home with your child.
 - Make sure your child knows her address, phone number, and her parents' places of work.
 - Remind your child never to go anywhere with a stranger.

Smoking

- Most adult smokers started smoking as teens. Children at this age may begin smoking by trying to fit in with friends, or think it is a fun activity at parties. They may be curious about what it is like. They may think it will help them relax. They may do it as a way to rebel against their parents. Pre-teens and teens are not often concerned with future health problems. It may be more helpful to emphasize the negatives that your child can see and feel now:
 - Cigarettes do not smell good. The smell will get into your child's clothes, room, hair, and breath.
 - Your child will be forced to smoke outside (even when it is cold) away from other people. Your child may not be able to participate in certain events because she smokes.
 - Cigarettes cost a lot of money. An average smoker spends at least \$2500 a year on cigarettes. Your child can probably think of many other ways to spend her money.
- If you smoke as a parent, set a quit date and stop. Set a good example for your child. If you cannot quit, do NOT smoke in the house or near children.

Immunizations

These immunizations are recommended for children entering seventh grade, usually at eleven or twelve years of age:

- Tdap booster for tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis.
- Menactra (meningococcal meningitis) vaccine.
- HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccine is recommended for eleven- to twelve-year-olds. This is a vaccine that protects against sexually transmitted genital warts and cervical cancer. The vaccine is given in a three-dose series. Ask your healthcare provider for more information about HPV vaccine and the diseases against which it protects.
- An annual flu vaccine is recommended.

Next Visit

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that your child have a check-up every year.