

11-14 YEAR OLD WELL CHILD VISIT

What to Expect from Adolescents at this Age

The close friends that she has had will still be in her life, but she might start to make new friends also. This may be a hard time for her because her interests, appearance and behavior will start to change. She might start to dress a certain way or pick up certain hobbies as she tries to fit in with her friends. Watch her closely and talk to her often as she becomes more independent. Look for signs of low self-esteem, low confidence, lack of attention or depressed mood.

She will want more privacy. It is okay to give her privacy as long you can talk to her openly and comfortably. She should assume responsibility for her belongings, chores, activities and schoolwork. Her ability to make decisions independently grows quickly at this age. Ask for her opinion on appropriate issues.

Her relationship with you may begin to change. She might have mood swings and might start arguments with you as she tries to show her independence. This is common at this age. You should respond by giving her unconditional love while at the same time setting clear boundaries. Try to balance being accepting, firm and democratic with your child.

Things to Know about Caring for Adolescents

Diet:

- In order to build healthy bones and teeth, your child needs plenty of calcium. Calcium comes from dairy foods, like milk, cheese, and yogurt. Make sure he gets 3 cups of lowfat milk and other dairy products like low-fat cheese and yogurt every day.
- He also needs at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day. They have vitamins and minerals he needs. Serve lean meats, chicken, fish and other sources of protein and iron.
- Avoid giving him sweet and salty foods, fast foods, sugary drinks and sodas. They can damage teeth, cause behavior problems, and lead to being overweight with health problems in the future.
- Try to make sure he eats breakfast every day. It will help him concentrate do well in school and sports.

Sleeping Habits: Your child needs 8-10 hours of sleep every night. Keep a regular routine so that he gets the best sleep possible.

Oral Hygiene: Your child should brush her teeth twice a day and floss once a day. Make sure she sees a dentist yearly.

Activities:

- What children see on TV and how long they watch TV can cause sleeping problems, behavior problems, weight problems and violence.
- Limit "screen time" (TV, movies, video and computer games) to 1-2 hours a day when you are present. Think of other things your child can do instead of watching TV. Encourage sports or finding activities outside of school (like dancing, art or music).
- Encourage him to be physically active for at least 1 hour a day most days of the week. Sports can teach him teamwork and give him a healthy level of competitiveness. Show your child your support by attending his activities. This will make him feel proud and confident.

School:

- Praise your child's efforts in school. Let him know how important his successes and achievements at school are. Monitor him as he takes on more responsibility for his homework. He may need your help with organizing his schoolwork, sports and other extracurricular activities.
- Ask him to talk to you about his school experiences (what he enjoys and does not enjoy, what he has difficulty with). If he seems anxious about going to school, talk to him and make sure he is not being bullied at school.
- If he is having difficulty learning, talk to his teacher about evaluation for special help or tutoring. He should do his homework in a quiet, well-lit space without distractions (like TV).

Discipline:

- Parents teach primarily by role modeling. Be a positive role model for your child with your activities, values, morals and attitudes. Continue to praise and reward your child for good behavior or accomplishments.
- If you need to correct your child, don't do it in front of other people. Take her out of the room and talk to her privately. Give her clear and fair limits (and consequences).

Puberty:

- In girls, puberty typically begins around 9-10 years with breast development. Within 2-3 years, she will likely start having her periods. Girls have an earlier growth spurt than boys.
- In boys, puberty typically begins around 9-11 years with testicular development. Other physical changes include skin changes (often acne), voice changes (boys), development of body hair and body odor, and changes in body muscle and fat.

Looking Ahead:

- Talk to your child about facing pressure to smoke, drink, have sex, take drugs or abuse inhalants. Your child will be faced with these pressures and needs your guidance on how to be able to say no to them.
- Focus on communication. Be involved in school, activities and friendships. Encourage them to invite their friends to come home with them.
- In the coming years, your adolescent needs unconditional love in addition to clear and consistent boundaries (family rules, limits, and expectations).