

Preadolescent Development – 9 to 12 years

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Physical growth and development varies considerably among this age group. These children may:

- Have an appetite that fluctuates sharply
- Be energetic and high-spirited
- Favor active, highly charged games and sports
- Want to excel in sports and recreational skills
- Develop a greater interest in clothing and appearance
- Have a curiosity about drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

Changes due to puberty can occur as early as age 8 in girls and age 9 in boys. Discuss any questions concerning these physical changes with your physician or nurse practitioner.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The preteen's emotions fluctuate between the dependence of a child and the independence of an adult. These children may:

- Become increasingly self-conscious
- Experience sudden dramatic emotional changes associated with puberty.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

These children focus a great deal on socialization. They:

- Want to talk, dress and act like their friends
- May sit and talk for long periods of time with friends
- May give in to peer pressure more readily
- Want parental assistance, but may resist offers of it
- Are critical of parents
- Are very aware of the opposite sex.

NUTRITION

A proper diet plays a very important role because of rapid growth during these years. The following tips may help:

- Fat intake should come from healthier foods such as cheese or yogurt. Try to limit junk food and fast food meals
- Keep the household supply of junk food such as candy, cookies and potato chips to a minimum
- Stock up on low-fat, healthy items for snacks such as fruit, raw vegetables, whole grain crackers and yogurt
- Include raw or cooked fruits and/or vegetables at meals even when school age children act disinterested. Their tastes are constantly changing. These foods can supply your child with important vitamins and minerals.

SAFETY

All children should wear seat belts at all times when in a vehicle. Accidents pose the greatest threat to the life and health of your child. More school age children die of injuries than all other diseases combined. Yet, you can prevent most major injuries.

It is best to keep all firearms out of your home. If you must have a gun, keep it unloaded and in a locked place with a trigger lock separate from the ammunition. Your child faces a greater likelihood of being shot by himself, a friend or a family member than by an intruder. Talk to your child about guns in school and on your streets. Find out if your child's friends carry guns.

SPORTS SAFETY

Your child may play one or more sports during these years. Be sure your child uses the proper protective equipment for the sport.

Make sure your child wears a helmet while riding a bicycle or while rollerblading. Participating in these activities at dusk or after dark is very dangerous.

SEX, DRUGS, ALCOHOL, SMOKING

Discussions about sex, drugs, alcohol and smoking with your child are extremely important. Your child may experience pressure from friends to engage in these activities. When discussing them, try to understand your child's feelings and viewpoints. Provide him or her with access to accurate and appropriate information.

ADVICE FOR PARENTS

- Establish fair, understandable rules about chores, watching television, outside activities, homework and bedtime
- Communicate with your child
- Show interest in your child's daily activities
- Show affection. This will contribute to your child's self-esteem
- Understand the importance of serving as a parental role model
- Encourage age-appropriate independence and self-responsibility
- Know your child's whereabouts at all times.