

Helping your Adolescent Stay Healthy!

As the parent of an adolescent, you are already beginning to see changes in how much you are able to influence them. You may think that you have already lost the opportunity to have a significant impact on their life. And it is true that it won't be long before you will no longer have day-to-day influence on their health and health decisions. That's why it's so important to act now. You are not the *only* influence in your adolescent's life, but you can still be the *best* influence!

Visit the doctor: When your adolescent was a child, you took her to the doctor for her annual check-up. You still need to make sure that your adolescent gets a check-up every year. Your teen's doctor can be a trusted source of information about puberty, body changes, social relationships, sexuality, obesity, and the potential for diseases. Your teen's doctor can also tell you about the shots that are required under New Jersey law and make sure that your teen is up-to-date. If your teen has special healthcare needs, his doctor can help you make decisions about what shots are appropriate.

Talk to your teen about health issues: Does your teen have a special healthcare need like diabetes, depression, asthma, a heart condition, or significant allergies? Do these or other conditions run in your family? Is your adolescent exercising less as their homework burden increases or they watch more TV or spend more time on the internet? Have the healthy lunches you used to pack been replaced by open campus and fast food? Take the time – while you still have their ear! – to talk with your adolescent about these and other health issues.

Help your teen become a “health self-advocate:” Our country's healthcare system is hard for adults to understand. Imagine how difficult it is for your teen! But in just a few years, your teen will be an adult. He will need to know how to make his own health decisions. By talking with your adolescent about the importance of their health, and sharing information with them about their health coverage and the health decisions that you have made for them in the past, you can begin the process of teaching them how to become effective decision-makers in their own healthcare.

For more information about helping your adolescent stay healthy, visit the website of the American Academy of Pediatrics at <http://www.aap.org/parents.html>. You can also check out SPAN's Family to Family Health Resource Center website at <http://www.spannj.org/Family2Family/>. Don't wait until it's too late!