It’s Your Health: What You Need to Know

As you get older, you are able to take more responsibility for your own health. Here are some things you can do now to prepare. Then, when you’re an adult, you’ll be ready to make responsible decisions regarding your health.

1. Learn about your health problems. Ask your parents, caregivers, nurses and doctors to explain if you don’t understand what they are saying. Repeat back to them what you hear, to be sure you understand the information.

2. Learn the names of all of your medicines. Know what your medicines do, when to take your medicines and how much (dosage) to take. It’s important to take your medicine the right way. Keep a list with you all the time if you have too many medicines to remember.

   • Figure out a way to remember to take your medicines on your own. You can use a chart, or an alarm on your watch or cell phone. You can do this without your parent reminding you every day. If you need help remembering, ask your nurse, child life specialist, parent or caregiver to help you come up with a plan.

   • Learn how to read the labels on medicines (name, dosage, when you need refills).

   • Watch your mom, dad or caregiver when they call in for medicine or supply refills. Practice making calls yourself with a parent or caregiver on the other line or standing beside you.

   • Taking street drugs or drinking alcohol can affect how well your medications work and can make your health problems worse. Be honest when you talk to members of your healthcare team about this. Their priority is to help you stay healthy.

   • It can also be dangerous to take prescription medicines that aren’t yours, so discuss that with your healthcare provider, too. Someone else’s asthma inhaler, for example, may look like yours, but it may not be right for you.

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3. Know if you have any allergies (to any medicines, foods or something you touch, such as latex). Learn how to avoid these items and when you need to speak up. For instance, if you are allergic to nuts, ask if there are nuts in cookies. Or if you have a latex allergy, you’ll want to know if gloves are latex. Know what treatment you need if you eat or touch what you’re allergic to.

4. Know when you need to seek medical help right away. What are your warning symptoms? Ask whom to call and what to do if you have any warning symptoms.

5. Carry an emergency card that lists your health problems, medicines, allergies, names and phone numbers of doctor(s) and why you see them, phone numbers for emergency contacts, and the name of your insurance company. Keep this card with you all the time. You can also get a medical alert bracelet with this information. If you have a cell phone, program in your doctors’ and emergency contacts’ numbers.

7. Speak up at your doctor appointments.
   • Write down your questions before you see the doctor. If you don’t feel comfortable doing that, talk with your parent or caregiver before your appointment about questions you have.
   • Let the doctors and nurses know if you are nervous about talking things out. If talking face-to-face is hard for you, you can e-mail them ahead of time. They want to help you.
   • If your family uses a binder to organize all your medical information, help keep it up to date by adding information after appointments or when your medicine changes.
   • Ask someone on your healthcare team about special programs that would help you learn more about your medical condition (like summer camps, educational days, support groups, videos and books).

8. Learn to eat healthy. If you have a special diet, follow it.
   • Go food shopping with your parents or caregiver and help pick healthy choices.
   • Learn to read the labels on food, especially if you’re allergic to some foods.
   • Help prepare meals.

9. Think about how you might get to your appointments when you are older. If you live near public transportation, learn how to use it to get places.

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Contact Information

REACH Line
267-426-5569
REACH@email.chop.edu

REACH
Rapport, Empowerment, Advocacy, through Connections and Health is a program for teens and young adults ages 12 – 24 with special healthcare needs and their families, created by teens and young adults with special healthcare needs.

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