

Etiology.

Teenagers begin smoking for a variety of reasons, including imitation of adult behavior, peer pressure, a desire to imitate behaviors and lifestyles portrayed in movies and advertisements, and a desire to control weight, especially among young women. Teenagers who do not smoke usually have family members and friends who do not smoke or who oppose smoking. Most teens who refrain from smoking have a desire to succeed in academics or athletics and plans to go to college (see [Community Focus](#) box). Although smoking among college students has increased in recent years, rates of smoking are highest among adolescents who do not complete high school.

Community Focus

Early Sexual Maturation, Alcohol, and Cigarettes

Smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol among adolescents are complex behaviors that are not explained by any one cause or factor. Some theorists and investigators believe there is a relationship between biological maturation and risk-taking behaviors. For example, young girls who are sexually mature at an earlier age than their peers are often attracted to older girls and boys who may engage in risk-taking behaviors. If older teens smoke, drink, and drive while under the influence of alcohol with no adverse consequences (e.g., no motor vehicle crashes), young girls may believe that they, too, will be safe while smoking, drinking, or riding in an automobile with friends who are drinking.

Although parents and nurses cannot influence the time of biological maturation, they can identify young girls who are at risk for the initiation of risk-taking behaviors because of early puberty. Parents need to understand that an early-maturing daughter might be uncomfortable with her body, and they should take advantage of opportunities to build her self-esteem. Parental sensitivity to the importance of peer group acceptance and parental support of a teenage daughter who feels left out or different are crucial. School nurses can provide anticipatory guidance to these girls and help them to role-play coping strategies for situations that involve offers to smoke and drink. In addition, school nurses can provide