

For Teens: Transitioning from a Pediatrician to an Adult Care Provider



The teen years are a time of gaining more independence. You are moving closer to adulthood. And you are starting to take on new responsibilities for yourself including taking more control of your own healthcare.

In a few years you will need to change from seeing a healthcare provider who treats children (a pediatrician) to one who treats adults (an adult healthcare provider). So it's helpful to start taking an active role in your care now. This may sound like a lot. But it starts with small steps. It will happen over a few years. And your parents and your current provider will support you along the way. Read on to learn more.

You are almost an adult

Up until now, your parents have made all your healthcare appointments and decisions for you. But when you turn 18, you are legally an adult. Then you will legally be in charge of making your own healthcare decisions. Your parents will still be able to help you and offer guidance. But your provider will only be able to share your health information with your parents if you sign forms saying that that's OK. So the more you can do now to learn how to manage your care, the better prepared you will be later.

When do I have to stop seeing my pediatrician?

Ask your current healthcare provider how long you can continue to see them. This will depend on the provider and their office. It will also depend on how you feel about changing providers. Keep in mind that:

- Some pediatrician offices may stop seeing you once you turn 18. Other offices may keep seeing you until around age 21.
- If you are seeing a family medicine provider, you may not have to change providers. Family medicine providers see people of all ages.

Taking active steps now

Taking an active role over your healthcare doesn't happen all at once. It starts with some planning and smaller steps at first. Your early teens is a good time to begin. Here's a general guide to help you.

Age 12 to 13: Learning about your health

It's important to know all of your personal health information. Start by talking with your parents about it and asking questions. Here are some things you should know:

- Any health conditions you have
- Any allergies you have
- Any medicines you take, and the dosages. This includes over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbs, and other supplements.
- What immunizations you've had
- Any surgeries you've had
- Your health insurance information
- Any family history of disease, like diabetes or cancer

Keep your health information all together in one place, such as in a folder or on your phone.

Age 14 to 15: Starting to practice skills

Now's a good time to be more actively involved with your healthcare visits. Some of the skills you can start to practice now with your parents' help are:

- Practice calling and making your provider appointments
- Add provider appointments to your calendar
- Have your own insurance card
- Fill out medical forms yourself
- Check yourself in at provider appointments
- Talk directly with your provider during visits. Ask your provider questions. If something isn't clear to you, ask them to explain it so you understand.
- Learn how to call the pharmacy to fill and refill your own prescriptions

Age 16 to 17: Planning ahead and doing more

Now that you've had some time to practice and gain skills, you may be ready to:

- Schedule your own provider visits
- See the provider on your own for part or all of your visit, without a parent in the room
- Get your prescriptions filled and refilled
- Store all your healthcare records and receipts in one place.
- Think about what age you want to switch to an adult care provider. Talk to your parents and your provider about this, too.

Age 18 to 21 and beyond: Moving to an adult care provider

You are legally an adult now. It's time for you to:

- Look for an adult care provider. Ask your current provider to recommend someone. Or ask friends if they like their provider. You can also see the same provider as your parents.
- Make sure the new provider accepts your health insurance.
- Make an appointment with the new provider.
- Have your pediatrician send your medical records to your new provider.

How often will I need to see an adult care provider?

In general, you should schedule a well visit with your adult care provider once a year. But everyone's personal health needs are different. Talk with the provider to discuss if you should be seen more often.

What can I expect during a well visit?

A well visit will include a physical exam and blood pressure check. The provider will ask about your overall health. They'll talk with you about any concerns you have. Ask any questions and make sure you understand all the answers. You may need to have blood work done. You may need screenings for things like high cholesterol or diabetes.

Your provider can talk with you about sexual issues and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). If you were assigned female at birth, you will also need to see a gynecologist (see below).

Should I see a gynecologist?

Teens who were assigned female at birth may want to consider seeing a gynecologist. This is a doctor who specializes in female reproductive issues. They're focused on the uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, and breasts. You can begin seeing a gynecologist when you are between ages 13 and 15. Many family doctors also provide basic gynecological services.

See your gynecologist or address gynecological issues with your family doctor once a year. This is in addition to well visits with your main healthcare provider. See them to treat vaginal infections and talk about any problems you may have with your period. They can also talk with you about sexual health issues and STIs. You won't need to have a routine pelvic exam or a test for cervical cancer (Pap test) until age 21.

What if I'm seeing a pediatric specialist?

You may also be seeing a pediatric specialist for a certain health problem. This can include health issues like allergies or blood disorders. In some cases you may have to switch to an adult specialist for this issue as well. Talk with your current specialist about this.

Health insurance coverage for adult children

Under the Affordable Care Act, U.S. children who are dependents can stay on their parents' health insurance until age 26. This is the case even if by age 26 they are living on their own or married.

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