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Feelin' Fine

A Girl's Guide to Good Health

Produced by



Your health — It's in your hands!

One of the most positive things about your visit to the Our Kids Center is the chance to learn about the way your body works and how to take care of it. As you read through this guide you should realize that much of what it takes to be a healthy person is well within your own control. You hold the key to your health. The understanding of how to best use your resources is important to the process of gaining good health. Teaching you is the goal of *Feelin' Fine*. Use this brochure as an introduction to treating yourself right. It is also an excellent reference if any health-related questions ever arise. We hope that you can find what you need in this booklet to develop lifelong habits to make you healthy, strong and safe.

What exactly do you mean by "health?"

Health care people used to think that health simply meant that a person had no disease or pain. Today that definition has grown and now includes many more areas of a person's life. Medical caregivers learned more about how our bodies mature and change. Then they also began to change how they thought about the idea of health, the healthy body and what's considered normal.

Now doctors and nurses don't only think of health as having no disease or pain. And they don't relate health only to our physical bodies. They've begun to think of our health as being more than simply eating vegetables and taking vitamins. Now they include other areas of our lives. Examples are healthy minds (mental health), healthy feelings (emotional health), healthy social interactions (social health or well being) and healthy spirits (spiritual health).

Today's healthy people are those whose bodies and minds work normally and let them enjoy life. These people also do things to try and keep diseases and problems away. They stay far from drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and other harmful stuff. This is called prevention. People practice prevention by eating balanced diets, exercising regularly, staying away from stressful situations and doing things that make them happy and able to relax. Another important part of prevention is the idea of regular visits to health care providers such as pediatricians, internists, gynecologists, nurses, dentists, etc.

What kinds of health care providers are there and how are they different?

There are many different types of health care providers including all types of doctors, dentists, nurses, psychologists, etc. The following explains a few of the ones that someone your age may come into contact with.

A **pediatrician** is a doctor who knows all about the special needs of children of all ages. He/she is probably the first doctor that anyone ever remembers going to for checkups.

A **gynecologist** is a doctor that is interested in the health of women, especially reproductive systems and needs.

An **internist** is a general doctor for adults who knows about all the systems of the body. He/she practices internal medicine. When adults "go to the doctor" for routine checkups, most of them see internists. The internist checks the heart, lungs, eyes, ears, nose, throat, like a pediatrician, and also collects other information like blood pressure, cholesterol levels and glucose levels. Sounds like the internist does it all, right? Well his/her job is very important and very diverse. He/she sees all kinds of patients with all kinds of problems. Today, internists are also beginning to be the choice for many women for their womanly needs as well. Since the internist already does so much, many women don't want to have to go to two doctors for checkups and choose to let the internist do many of the things that the gynecologist would normally do.

A **general practitioner** or family doctor is just that. He/she sees all the members of families and is usually the first to notice if something is wrong. The family doctor wears many hats, performing the duties of pediatrician, gynecologist and internist.

A **nurse practitioner** is a registered nurse (RN) with advanced training in diagnosing and treating illness. Nurse Practitioners prescribe medications, treat illness, and administer physical exams. NP's differ from physicians in that they focus on prevention, wellness, and education.

A **physician assistant**, or PA, is a licensed and highly skilled health care professional, trained to provide patient evaluation, education, and health care services. A PA works with a physician to provide medical care and guidance needed by a patient.

I know what I want to say or ask, but I need help finding the right words to use.

Here is a list of terms and their definitions that you may find helpful when looking for a good way to tell someone about a problem or to ask questions. You should also feel free to check this list for any words you read in this brochure that you are unsure of.

Abdomen: the portion of your body below your chest and above the waist where the intestines, bladder and uterus are located.

Abstinence: the practice of not having sex.

Cervix: the portion of the uterus that connects to the vagina. The cervix has a small opening through which menstrual fluid (blood) flows.

Estrogen: female sex hormone produced mainly in the ovaries that trigger breast development.

Gynecologist: a doctor that specializes in the health of women, especially reproductive health.

Menopause: the point at which a woman stops having periods.

Ovaries: a pair of female reproductive glands, which hold eggs and produce estrogen and progesterone.

Pap test: a procedure in which cells are taken from the cervix. This determines if there is an infection, hormone conditions and cancerous cells in the cervix.

Pelvis: the area of the body where the legs come together including the hips and genitals.

Penis: in a male, the sexual organ located below the waist and between the legs, through which semen and urine leave the body.

Period: a monthly discharge of blood and cells from inside the uterus.

Progesterone: female hormone produced mainly in the ovaries.

Puberty: the period of life during which an individual changes from a child to an adult and becomes capable of reproduction.

Sexual intercourse: (also just called “sex”) physical contact between two people. There are generally three kinds of sex: Vaginal (penis in vagina), anal (penis in anus), and oral (mouth to penis, mouth to vagina, or mouth to anus).

Sexually transmitted infection (STI): (also called sexually transmitted disease; for simplicity, they will be referred to as STIs here) an infection most often obtained through sex that may be caused by viruses, bacteria or parasites.

Speculum: a plastic or metal instrument used to separate the walls of the vagina. This allows the healthcare provider to examine the vagina, cervix, and to perform the Pap test.

Uterus (womb): a small, pear-shaped, female organ from which a woman has a period and where babies normally develop.

Vagina: in a female, the canal that stretches from the cervix to the outside of the body.

What is puberty?

Maybe you already know what puberty is and understand how and why changes happen in your body during puberty. This overview is to make sure that all those changes are perfectly clear.

Puberty is the period of life when boys and girls change into women and men. It usually occurs between the ages of eleven and sixteen, but may begin as early as nine and end as late as twenty-two years of age. For girls, the body begins to produce large amounts of two hormones, called estrogen and progesterone, which are produced in glands and are responsible for most of the changes that you experience. It’s important to remember that all these changes may seem weird, but that they are all perfectly normal.

One of the first changes that occur during puberty is the development of breasts. Breasts are nature’s way of providing milk to newborn babies. They start out as two small bumps that grow as you grow into a woman. Although all girls have them, they grow at different ages and come in different shapes and sizes depending on the girl. Some girls develop breasts at ten or eleven years old while others don’t get them until thirteen or fourteen. It is also common for breasts on the same person to grow at different rates. Many girls experience periods when one breast is larger than the other. Whenever or however your breasts grow is perfectly fine. That’s part of what makes you unique.

Another change that you might notice during puberty is in your skin. Because your body is undergoing many changes, the system hasn’t quite worked out all the kinks. Your skin begins to produce oils which are responsible for keeping it healthy. These oils may cause pimples if too much is produced. The excess oils build up in the glands where they are

produced and clog the pores in your skin causing acne and pimples. There isn't much you can do to keep pimples away, although most doctors advise keeping your skin clean by washing a lot, avoiding sweet or oily foods and keeping your fingers away from your face.

You will also notice that your hips begin to expand during puberty. Once again, nature is thinking ahead to a time when you may want to have children and allowing you more room in the area where they will grow. Around the same region, you will probably see pubic hair starting to grow as well.

The biggest change that girls go through during puberty is the beginning of menstruation (your period). This is the process whereby your body prepares your uterus each month to receive a fertilized egg. An egg is released each month by the ovaries. This egg may eventually receive sperm through sexual intercourse with a man, become fertilized and grow into a child. The body prepares in this way regardless of whether you want it to or not. Whether you're abstaining from sex or having sex, these changes happen. The uterus builds up nutrients and blood to nourish a growing baby. If the released egg isn't fertilized (if you don't get pregnant) the uterus forgets the whole plan and gets rid of the lining it had been preparing in the uterus. The effect that you see is bleeding each month. This is called menstruation or "having a period." This process may begin at different ages, depending on the girl. Cramps and emotional changes are normal occurrences often associated with periods. Menstruation continues until you reach about 50 years old or so and then you stop releasing eggs and having periods. This is called menopause. At this point, a woman is no longer able to have children.

Understanding these changes is important to keep in mind so you will realize that what is happening to you is normal. Everything that you go through during puberty has a purpose for later in your life. Although it may seem like a drag while it's happening, you'll be happy later that it did.

What kinds of infections are out there? How can I make sure I don't catch any of them?

There are more than 20 illnesses that are classified as sexually transmitted infections. STIs are usually caused by either a bacterium or a virus. STIs caused by viruses have no cure. STIs may or may not display symptoms and may cause permanent physical damage. It is important to know that STIs can be spread by any type of intense sexual contact – oral, anal or vaginal. The best way to avoid all STIs is to practice abstinence, or to

not have sex at all. But if you decide that you want to have sex, always practice safer sex. Using condoms is probably the easiest way to do this. Just make sure that you understand the proper way to use them before you try. There are many other forms of safe sexual pleasure such as closed mouth kissing and fondling with clothes on. Check out the resources at the end of the brochure or ask an adult you trust to find out more!

Who can I talk to if I want to know more about healthy living or if I think that I may have a problem?

Parents are usually an excellent source of help if you feel that you want to learn more about healthy living, if you feel like something may be wrong with your body or if you don't like the way someone is treating you. Sometimes it may be hard to talk to parents, though. Although they can be very helpful, they are not the only people who can help. In fact, some girls find that they have an easier time talking to another trusted adult. The most important thing is that you trust the person you talk to and feel comfortable telling him/her about the problem.

In addition to finding an adult that you can talk to, remember why you are talking to him/her in the first place. Make sure that you get all of your questions answered and talk about all the things that are bothering you. If you talk to a teacher and she cannot give you all the answers you need or doesn't listen as well as you would like her to, go to someone else. Just remember: keep talking until you feel better about the problem. The problem may be a pain that you are having, a funny feeling that something's just not right, the fact that you don't like the way someone may be touching you or any other question/concern that is bothering you.

If I have a problem, or think that I do and want to see a doctor, what will the office visit be like?

Visits to health care providers (doctors, dentists, nurse practitioners, nurses, physician assistants, social workers, and psychologists) may be a subject that causes confusion for some girls. It is okay to be nervous, scared or afraid of the unknown. But your provider can help you to deal with those feelings. Also, if you sort of know what to expect when you go, it can really help to make those feelings disappear.

As young children, just about everyone has experienced what a regular physical exam is like. A regular physical is when a health care provider checks your eyes, ears, throat, heartbeat, height and weight. These exams are usually performed by pediatricians (doctors for children) or nurses, and

should be done every year or so just to make sure that everything is okay. If you play sports you may have to get these physical exams more often or the doctor may do a little more during the exam. If you have trouble seeing the chalkboard in school, you may also see a doctor who specializes in helping people to see better.

You should also go to the dentist twice each year for a routine check-up and cleaning to make sure that your teeth are strong and healthy. The dentist may teach you how to floss and brush your teeth better or fill cavities that you may get from eating too much candy.

What is a gynecological exam and why do I need one?

During puberty, our bodies change a lot and we begin to need new sorts of exams that we didn't need before. The following are all good reasons to see a gynecologist or some other provider that does those sorts of exams:

- All women who are 18 (if you are sexually active at a younger age, then when the activity begins) must have regular yearly gynecological exams
- If you are planning pregnancy
- Suspect that you have an STI
- Have a history of sexual illness
- Have a mother or sister who developed breast cancer before menopause
- If you have any of the following changes in your body, you should seek a healthcare provider to conduct a gynecological exam immediately:
 - puckering, dimpling or other changes to the skin of your breasts
 - inverted nipples (sort of like “innie” nipples instead of the normal “outie” ones)
 - a change in the size or shape of your breasts
 - discharge from your nipples not associated with breast feeding
 - increase in breast pain or discomfort before your period
 - severe pain in your pelvis
 - abnormal bleeding between your periods
 - an unusual discharge, pain, swelling, or itching of your vagina or lower abdomen

What should I expect during a gynecological examination?

1Your exam will begin with the nurse taking your blood pressure, weight and pulse. He/she should ask you when was the first day of your last period and if you're having any problems you need to discuss with your gynecologist.

2Next you will be asked to change into a hospital gown (you may leave your socks on). Once you're ready and sitting on the examining table, your gynecologist will come in, accompanied by the nurse.

3Your healthcare provider will listen to your heart and lungs, check your breasts for any changes or lumps and feel your abdomen for any irregularities. A reliable exam of your breasts should take no more than a few minutes.

4During your breast exam your provider should discuss monthly self-breast exam with you. You should receive instructions on how to do the exam yourself at home. Later on in life, your provider should also discuss mammogram screening which is a test he/she performs to check for breast cancer.

5You will be asked to lie back on the table and put your feet in the stirrups. You need to scoot down to the end of the table and spread your knees apart. Next an instrument called a speculum will be inserted into your vagina which will hold the walls of your vagina open so that the healthcare provider can view the area, including your cervix, and collect your Pap smear sample. This procedure may seem very weird at first. It may even be a little uncomfortable. You may experience a gentle tugging or cold sensation.

6The Pap smear test is used to screen for cancer of the cervix. A long cotton swab is inserted and brushed against your cervix to obtain cervical cells to be checked in a lab. Deaths due to cervical cancer have declined greatly because of regular Pap smears being done.

7The provider will also use a gloved finger to insert into your vagina while feeling your lower abdomen with the other hand to check the size and shape of your uterus. He/she is feeling for changes in the ovaries, such as cysts or tumors.

8You'll be allowed to dress and your healthcare provider will go over your health history and any other issues you wish to discuss. At this time you should tell your provider about the timing of any illness you experience, irregular or painful periods, problems with yeast infections or painful sex. This is also a good time to ask questions about health, birth control, diet or any other unrelated symptoms you may have.

But I feel good!

Why do I need to see a healthcare provider if I am not sick?

Regular visits to your healthcare provider help to make sure that you are as healthy as you feel. Unfortunately, there are many problems that may arise in our bodies. Many of them may develop slowly and silently, giving you no warning. One way to help prevent this from happening is scheduling trips to the pediatrician, internist, gynecologist, dentist or other healthcare provider. During these visits, these professionals can check to make sure that you really are feeling fine and functioning normally.

They can also give you advice about changing some of the things you do in your life to prevent bad things from happening. One example of this prevention is flossing your teeth. Flossing prolongs the life of your teeth and stops problems before they start. Another example is having regular breast exams done and conducting self-breast exams the way the healthcare provider tells you to. This is a safeguard against developing breast cancer and may allow the disease to be stopped if it is detected early.

There are other examples of prevention as well. One of them is making sure that you get enough calcium in your diet to support healthy bones and stop osteoporosis (brittle and/or weak bones) in older age. Eating a diet balanced in all the food groups and exercising regularly are other ways that healthcare providers often tell us to ensure good health later in life.

Although there are many steps we can take in the quest for good health, they all have one thing in common: they are all related to developing good habits that we carry with us throughout life. Good health is not something that you can think about for a week. It involves developing a lifestyle to guide you to a long life of healthy living.

How do I choose a healthcare provider?

Choosing a healthcare provider can be a hard process. It may take several visits to different providers before you find a place that feels comfortable. Some things to keep in mind as you visit or hear about the experiences of others with different providers or clinics are:

- Whether you prefer a male or female
- How well the provider develops good relationships with patients
- How much time the provider has for each patient
- How willing the provider is to answer questions and provide information
- That it is okay to switch providers if you find one that you are not comfortable with

Where can I learn more?

Who can teach me more about my health?

There are websites that you may find helpful if you want to explore any of the topics discussed here or have some other questions. We have included a few websites for you to consider reviewing.

Websites:

<http://www.youngwomenshealth.org>

Helps teen girls and their parents improve their understanding of general health and development, as well as specific conditions and diseases.

<http://kidshealth.org>

Provides health information for kids, teens and parents. Provides teenagers with information about their changing bodies, sexuality, ways to stay healthy, school, jobs and friends.

<http://teengrowth.com>

Provides healthcare information on topics of emotions, health, alcohol, drugs, family, friends, sex, school and sports.

Other helpful websites include:

www.youngwomenshealth.org

www.plannedparenthood.org

www.pamf.org/teen

www.pamf.org/preteen

www.teenshealth.org

www.hopeclinicforwomen.org

Common Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

	What is it?	How do you get it?	Symptoms	Treatment	Long-term effects
Chlamydia	A common STI caused by a bacteria	Through vaginal or anal sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new or different discharge from the vagina • A burning feeling when urinating • A pain in the abdomen, sometimes with fever and chills • A pain during sex <p>Many people have chlamydia, but have no signs or symptoms.</p>	Chlamydia is treated with pills. One kind of medicine can cure it with one single pill. Other medicines must be taken for a week or more. If treated, chlamydia can be cured.	<p>If it is left untreated, it can cause serious problems, especially for girls:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infertility (unable to have babies) • Tubal pregnancy (baby begins to grow outside of the uterus) • Spread of the germ to the uterus causing hospitalization • Lower abdominal pain. • Spreading to other partners or babies during delivery.
Pubic Lice or Scabies	Tiny insects that live on the skin. Scabies, an itchy rash, is caused when a female burrows into a person's skin to lay her eggs. Pubic lice infect hairy parts of the body, especially around the groin and under the arms.	They are often, but not always, spread sexually. You can also pick them up by using the bed linen, clothes or towels of an infected person.	Mainly itching, especially at night. A rash usually appears in skin folds, between fingers or on wrists, elbows and around the genitals. Light brown insects the size of a pinhead can often be seen moving on the skin.	Both scabies and pubic lice are treated by special creams, lotions or shampoos, which you can buy in a drugstore. You may have to apply them more than once.	There are no long-term effects usually associated with scabies or pubic lice.

Common Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

	What is it?	How do you get it?	Symptoms	Treatment	Long-term effects
HIV/AIDS	AIDS = Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. AIDS is caused by the HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) which attacks the body's immune system. Without this protection, people with AIDS suffer from infections and cancers that can kill them.	Through an exchange of semen, vaginal fluid, blood or breast milk. This can happen during any type of sex, by sharing needles for injection or from an infected mother to her baby at the time of birth.	Your body reacts to the presence of the HIV by producing antibodies. If the test finds these antibodies fighting the disease, then that means you have the virus. AIDS is the last step of HIV infection. Infected people may get attacks of a strange pneumonia or develop skin or other cancers. HIV really has no symptoms. People who have HIV look normal.	There is no cure for HIV infection or AIDS. The virus stays in the body for the rest of your life. There are drugs which slow down the disease from destroying your immune system, but they are not cures. The most popular of these drugs is AZT.	Usually leads to death. Because HIV destroys the immune system's ability to fight off infections in the lungs, blood cells, liver, brain, intestines, skin, and genital tract, these infections become almost impossible to treat.
Gonorrhea	A common STI also called the clap, a drip or the burn	Through anal, oral and vaginal sex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new or different discharge from the vagina • A burning feeling when urinating • Pain in your abdomen, with fever and chills • Pain during sex • Pain, discharge and bleeding from the anus • Or may show no symptoms 	Antibiotics. If treated, it can be cured.	<p>If it is not treated, gonorrhea may cause serious problems later on, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pain in the lower abdomen • Infertility • Spread of the germ to the uterus causing hospitalization • Spreading to other partners or to babies during delivery.

Common Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

	What is it?	How do you get it?	Symptoms	Treatment	Long-term effects
Hepatitis B	An infection of the liver caused by a virus. It is the only STI that can be prevented by a vaccine.	Through infected blood and body fluids (semen, saliva). Therefore, it is easily transferred through sex, injection drug use, contact with blood or open sores, and sharing razors or toothbrushes. It can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby during childbirth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor appetite, nausea, vomiting • Headaches • A general unwell feeling • Jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and skin) • Dark, tea-colored urine • Light colored bowel movements 	There is no cure for Hepatitis B, but there is a vaccine to prevent this infection.	<p>Most people recover, but a few have serious problems later on, such as permanent liver disease, including liver cancer.</p> <p>Even without symptoms, you can pass the virus to others. Some people carry the Hepatitis B virus for the rest of their lives and unknowingly pass it to their sex partners.</p>
Genital Herpes	An STI that causes painful sores on and around the genitals. Members of the same virus family can cause fever blisters or cold sores on the mouth.	By direct contact with open sores, usually during sex (even oral). It is possible to pass the virus on to your sex partners even when symptoms are not present. Genital herpes is passed by skin to skin contact, so no types of sex are safe.	A tingling or itching in the genital area may occur a few days to one week after having sex. A cluster of tiny blisters soon appears. The blisters burst and leave painful sores, which can last from two to four weeks. A fever and headache may be associated with the first attack. The symptoms of genital herpes come and go with time. So just because you do not see the signs, you can't be sure that the person is safe.	<p>There is no cure for genital herpes.</p> <p>Medication may shorten the attacks and make them less painful.</p>	<p>After healing, the sores may reappear from time to time. Since a virus causes herpes, it cannot be cured; a person carries it forever.</p> <p>Surprisingly, herpes isn't a serious problem for most people. It can be serious, however in pregnancy. A mother can pass the virus to her baby during childbirth and the baby can become very sick.</p>

Common Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

	What is it?	How do you get it?	Symptoms	Treatment	Long-term effects
Yeast Infection	A fungus that is normally found in the mouth, intestines and vagina.	When there are too many yeast cells, symptoms of infection can occur without any sexual activity. Can also be passed back and forth sexually.	A bacterial infection in addition to irritation caused by yeast: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redness • Itchiness • Cottage cheese-like discharge 	Cream or suppositories that are placed inside the vagina, or an oral anti-fungal medication.	If not treated and then pregnancy occurs, it can be passed from mother to newborn as a mouth infection called “thrush.”
Human Papilloma Virus Infection (HPV)	A sexually transmitted virus that causes warts. This is the most common STI.	Through oral, anal or vaginal sex.	Warts on the genitals or anal region <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pinkish, red, gray or white warts • Burning • Itching • Pain • Bleeding 	Even though the virus is thought to remain in your body forever, there are treatment options such as cream, liquid nitrogen, or laser surgery. There is now a vaccine recommended for girls 9-26 years old that prevents the types of HPV that most commonly cause genital warts and cervical cancer.	Association with cancer of the cervix or penis.
Syphilis	A serious infection that can affect the whole body. You can have it without knowing and pass it on to others.	Through contact with infected body fluids. Through anal, oral and vaginal sex.	A painless sore may appear at the spot where the germ first enters the body, usually from nine to ninety days after sexual contact with an infected person. From six weeks to six months after infection, flu-like symptoms. Sometimes a rash appears on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet.	Antibiotics	If untreated, syphilis may cause serious health problems, such as heart disease, blindness, paralysis, brain damage or death.