Healthy Behaviors

Your future starts now!

You may not realize it, but you're already planning for your future. You're figuring out your likes, dislikes, interests, and values. Planning for your future is an ongoing process that includes learning, discovering, setting goals, taking risks, making choices and reflecting on those choices.

Discovering your interests and talents

Taking the time to think about your interests and abilities is the first step toward discovering what it is you want to do now as a teen, or even later when you become an adult. You can start by asking yourself the following questions: What are some subjects that interest me? What special skills or talents do I have? What would I like to learn more about? What would I like to change in my community or in the world?

Getting Experience

Once you have some ideas of what you would like to do or learn more about, the next step is to find opportunities that give you experience and teach you about the field you are interested in. Whatever it is you want to do, there is help out there. Here are some suggestions:

Get involved at school

Your school is a great resource with many clubs and activities you can join. Examples include student government, band, orchestra, choir, journalism, athletics, and clubs for the arts, drama, science, math or languages.

Community Organizations

There may be organizations in your community that offer programs. Many cities or communities offer sports leagues that are open to kids from different areas. Your local library, community centers, parks and recreation programs may have information about a variety of different opportunities.

Give back to your community

Dedicating your time and talents to a good cause in your community can be a great way to develop your interests and skills, while helping others at the same time. Some people volunteer because they want to change their community or world we live in, or to address an issue they think is important. Sometimes people volunteer to help others in need.

Get a job

Every year millions of teens work part time or summer jobs. Having a job is a great opportunity to gain experience and valuable skills while earning some money at the same time. Many teens have jobs in areas such as babysitting, fast food, retail, and newspaper delivery—these, as well as other jobs, can teach you a great deal about leadership, time management, and responsibility.

Tobacco

Don't smoke – Here's why.

Tobacco is addictive, meaning it is hard to stop using it. It contains nicotine, a drug that affects the brain. It goes through your bloodstream and reaches your brain in seconds. At first, it makes you feel good, but in less than an hour these good feelings go away and you start to feel nervous or moody. Since you want to feel good, you reach for another cigarette. Just like you crave pizza or chocolate, your brain begins to crave nicotine. But even though you are usually able to resist your cravings for your favorite foods, it is much harder to stay away from another cigarette. Eventually, you become hooked. And the younger you are when you start smoking, the more likely you are to become strongly addicted.

This may not be the first time you've heard that smoking can make you sick. It can cause diseases like cancer and emphysema, make your bones weak, and keep your heart from working right. But did you know that some symptoms start as soon as you smoke your first cigarette – no matter how young you are?

Alcohol

How can it hurt your body?

Alcohol can cause short-term and long-term damage to your body.

Brain

Drinking alcohol leads to a loss of coordination, poor judgment, slowed reflexes, distorted vision, loss of memory, and even blackouts.

Heart

Drinking alcohol could cause your blood pressure to rise, increase your heart rate, cause your heart to beat abnormally, and can increase the size of your heart.

Stomach

You're putting empty calories into your body, which could cause weight gain. If you drink too much, you may vomit because alcohol is toxic. Drinking alcohol can also cause stomach ulcers and cancer.

Alcohol
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Liver

Drinking alcohol could cause diseases such as cirrhosis (sir-o-sis). It can also cause hepatitis (inflamed liver) or even liver cancer, which weakens the liver's ability to clot and keep our blood free from poisons and bacteria.

Reproductive System

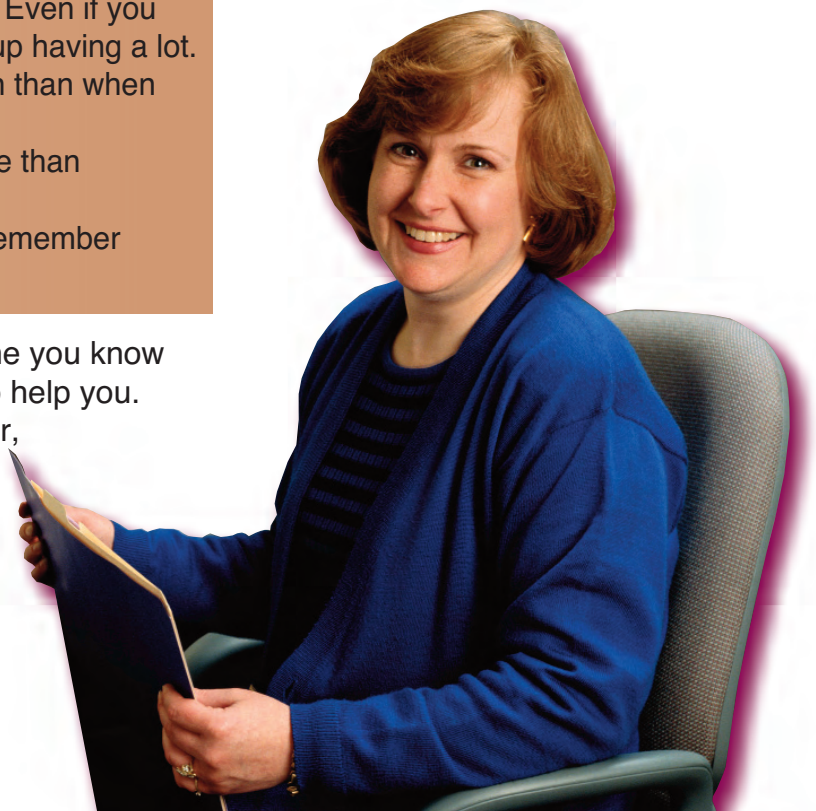
Heavy drinking can cause painful periods, heavy flow, discomfort before your period (PMS), and irregular periods (not getting your period when you're supposed to). Drinking also raises the risk of getting sexually assaulted and having unsafe sex.

What are the signs of addiction to alcohol?

Alcoholism is a disease where a person drinks too much alcohol on a regular basis and depends on alcohol to solve their problems. Even young people can have an alcohol problem. If you can relate to any of the items listed below, you should think about how alcohol is affecting your life and talk to an adult you trust for help.

- Alcohol has become more important than your schoolwork, family activities and relationships, or friendships.
- You use alcohol to escape from things that make you unhappy.
- You drink when you're mad at your parents, family, or friends.
- You can't control your drinking once you start. Even if you decide you'll only have a few drinks, you end up having a lot.
- When you drink, you act like a different person than when you are sober.
- When drinking with friends, you can drink more than anyone else.
- You have blackouts or events you don't fully remember after drinking.

Don't be afraid to talk to someone if you or someone you know has these signs. People want to help you. Talk to your parents, doctor, school counselor, or another adult you trust.



D • R • U • G • S

Drugs are substances that change the way your brain and body works. Drugs can be swallowed, inhaled, smoked, or injected. Whichever way drugs are taken, they end up in your bloodstream and go to all parts of your body. Many drugs are illegal, meaning it is against the law to have them.

Here's the real truth about illegal drugs

- Drugs wear off, but they can cause life-long damage to your body.
- Many drugs are addictive, which means it can be really hard to quit.
- Drugs affect your mind, making it harder to make safe choices and defend yourself in dangerous situations.
- Drugs are toxic and are not meant to be in your body. Your body can have an extreme reaction – you can become really sick or even die. This happens to teens every day.
- Drugs make you look ugly! Not only are drugs bad for your health, they can alter your looks dramatically!

Be safe: Choose not to use

Ok. So you know that drugs can cause terrible problems. Now what? The hardest part is telling your friends or anyone who offers you drugs, "NO", but it is definitely worth it! Most teens have made the decision not to use drugs. Making a decision not to use drugs takes courage but you can do it! Here are some ways you can choose not to use:

- Just say, "No thanks."
- Find an excuse to leave.
- Stay alert: don’t allow anyone to give you drugs without you knowing it.
- Ask for help from other friends or adults if someone is really pressuring you to use.
- Make new friends who respect your decision not to use drugs.
- Go to events that don't involve drugs. Don't put yourself in an unsafe or difficult situation.

Know when there's a problem

How do you know a friend has a problem with drugs? Here are some signs:

- A person who has a drug problem thinks drugs are the solution to all problems. She may spend all of her free time figuring out how to do drugs and how to get money to buy drugs.
- He/She is anxious, depressed, and irritable.
- He/She has dropped out of regular school activities and has group of drug-using friends.
- His/Her grades have dropped and she may not come to school regularly.
- His/Her sleep habits have changed.
- He/She seems to have gained or lost a lot of weight.
- He/She may look sick, tired, or even messy.
- He/She also seems to be taking more and more of the drug to get the same effect.

If you or someone you know shows some of these signs, you can get help! The only way out of drug addiction is to recognize that there is a problem and that you can get help from others. Turn to your parents, teachers, counselors, or any adult you trust—they care about you. Although it won't be easy, you or your friend can stop using drugs. Don't be ashamed. Asking for help could be the best decision you ever made.

Source: The information on this web page was taken directly from the GirlsHealth.gov website which was developed by the United States Department for Health and Human Services