

Teen Health Kit for Parents

✓ Helping Your Teen Steer Clear of Cigarettes

Tobacco use produces substantial health problems in teens, including an increase in the number and severity of respiratory illnesses, such as asthma and bronchitis, and decreased physical fitness. Tobacco use also increases the risk for cancer, heart disease, stroke, emphysema and other health problems later in life. The first symptoms of tobacco dependence among 12- and 13-year-olds can appear within days to weeks after occasional use begins, often before the onset of daily smoking.

It is important to realize that kids are exposed to cigarettes from a very early age, so it's never too soon to start talking with them about the health dangers of smoking. Use any opportunity, such as movies that depict people smoking and tobacco-related situations you may see in your own neighborhood, to start the conversation about why it's important not to start smoking cigarettes or using other drugs.

The following are a few tips to help your kids stay cigarette-free:

1. Role play with your fourth- through sixth-grader about what to do if someone offers him or her cigarettes or other drugs.
2. Ask your seventh- through ninth-grader about what he or she knows about the dangers of smoking and using drugs and add to your child's knowledge on the subject.
3. Focus on the more immediate consequences of smoking, such as bad breath; smelling like cigarettes; having dull skin and hair; having yellowed nails; coughing up phlegm; and being out of shape and breathless.
4. Continue to encourage your 10th- through 12th-grader for all the positive choices he or she makes.
5. Know who your teen's friends are and if they smoke or drink.
6. If your teen is looking for a job, encourage her to apply only at smoke-free workplaces.
7. Encourage your teen to get involved in team sports where he or she may be more likely to meet friends who don't smoke.
8. Make sure your child knows the rules (including no smoking) of your house and that you'll enforce them.

Remember:

The most important thing is to continue anti-smoking, anti-drug use conversations as your child grows.

If your teen does start smoking, here are some tips to share to help her stop:

1. Choose a "Quit Day" in the next two weeks.
2. Use the Internet to find a reputable smoking-cessation site sponsored by credible sources, such as www.smokefree.gov of the National Cancer Institute.
3. Ask your health care professional about treatment. A number of over-the-counter products that include self-help programs are available for people 18 and over. For younger teens, ask your doctor for advice.
4. See if your school or community offers N-O-T (Not on Tobacco), a teen program of the American Lung Association (www.lungusa.org).
5. Consider enrolling in group or individual therapy aimed at smoking cessation.

Suggest your teen do one of the following when he or she feels like smoking when trying to quit:

1. Go for a walk.
2. Call a friend.
3. Drink water or juice.
4. Take a deep breath and count to five. Let your breath out slowly. Repeat five times.
5. Tell yourself, "I can quit smoking."

Local Resources: New York State Smokers' Quitline
1-866-NY-QUITS
www.nysmokefree.com
Ask about counseling, free materials, and nicotine replacement therapy (patch, gum, lozenges).

Great American Smokeout Challenge
www.cancer.org

