

What are they talking about in there? – The Teen Visit

As a parent, the teen years can be like a roller coaster ride. Thrilling, fun and scary – and sometimes you just want to cover your eyes and hope it will end soon. Our goal at Tamalpais Pediatrics is to make sure your child is physically healthy, and support you and your family in providing the knowledge and guidance your teen needs to navigate these exciting years. We are here to educate your teen and monitor their physical, mental and emotional health.

Teen physicals are very different from earlier visits or check-ups. At a teen visit, we want you to have time to talk to us about your questions and concerns and pass on important information about your child's health. Because we want to give teens a chance to talk to us one on one, the parent will be there for some of the visit, but not the whole time. This is so that we can bring up subjects that teens may be shy about discussing in front of their parents. We want them to start feeling comfortable talking about issues related to their health – it's time for them to gain some independence and responsibility around diet, exercise, sleep and other health habits.

The time we spend with your teen will be confidential – we won't go over the details of what we talked about with you but we encourage you to ask your teen what we talked about. It's a good way to start a discussion about topics that can sometimes be uncomfortable. One exception to this rule is if something comes up that makes us worry that your teen may be in danger. If your teen is in danger or needs help – we will get them the help they need, and help them talk to you about whatever the issue may be.

Once your teen turns 18, they will be responsible for making their own medical decisions. They will be asked to fill out new paperwork for our office. They will have to give us specific permission to discuss their care with you.

At the beginning of the visit, your child will be asked to fill out a questionnaire about their mood and generally how they are feeling. This questionnaire is an important way for us to 'break the ice' and convey to kids that we are ready and willing to talk about their feelings, especially if they are feeling anxious, down or depressed. This questionnaire also helps us identify kids who may be having trouble but are reluctant to talk about it. We use a validated screening tool called the PSQ-9 which has been well studied for use in teens. Insurance companies require us to bill this separately. Most insurance companies recognize the importance of this and will cover this charge. Some insurance companies have decided that this charge should be paid by you as part of your co-insurance or deductible. We may not be able to predict what your insurance company's policy is. If you have questions, please let us know.

During the visit, we will cover a wide range of topics. We always discuss overall health and any injuries, complaints or health conditions they may have. If your child is playing sports we will also ask about family history of heart issues, heart or lung issues while exercising, concussions and past injuries.

We will be talking to your child about their home and school environment and relationships, school performance and goals, and activities, hobbies or sports that they are involved in. Diet is an important topic, since we want to make sure your child is eating a healthy, appropriate diet and growing well. We talk about depression, anxiety, mood and social issues with all teens. We all know that the teenage years can be stressful and it's important that teens have a trusted adult to turn to for help when they need it – we hope to be one of those trusted adults, but also want them to have someone else in their daily life who is there for them.

Drugs, alcohol and tobacco are important topics. We know that our kids may be exposed to these substances in high school, and here in Marin a significant number of teens are experimenting or using alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs, tobacco or other illegal drugs. We want to make sure that kids are healthy, safe and making good decisions.

Relationships, sexuality and sex are topics that all teens think about and sometimes struggle with. Our kids have lots of different sources of information – parents and other adults, school, the media, the internet and friends. Teens need the right information and resources to make healthy choices. Their relationships with peers – both friendships and romantic – are important for their growth, maturation and happiness. We want these to be healthy, respectful relationships.

From the time your child was an infant we have discussed sleep and screen time. This doesn't stop in the teen years, but now your child has more control over their digital devices and their bedtime. We want to make sure that the work, entertainment and social life that is happening on these devices isn't interfering with school, relationships and sleep.

These visits take a bit longer than checkups for younger kids. Hopefully this has helped you understand why. We have spent time over the years getting to know you, your family, and your child. Young adults should know that we are here to help them when they are hurt, sick or not doing well. We also want them to know that we are proud of their good decisions and ready to celebrate their success. We want everyone to get off this roller coaster smiling.