

How to talk to your doctor and other members of your healthcare team



Adolescent Transition

Adolescent Transition Education Package | **Fact Sheet 3**

An information sheet for patients transitioning from paediatric to adult health services

As you grow older you will start gaining more and more independence in a range of areas including your healthcare. Life for an adolescent involves lots of changes, decisions and choices. Having a medical condition or disability can add extra issues to work through. These issues may be complicated and personal so it is important that you know who to talk to and how to talk to them.

As a young person you will probably rely on your parents/carers or friends for support with any complex issues you're facing. However, although these support networks can offer you some great advice, they may not be able to fully answer any health concerns or emotional needs you may be experiencing. You may just feel awkward asking them personal questions, this is where your doctor or member of healthcare team will come in!

Whether it is your local doctor, your RCH specialist, a nurse or a physiotherapist, your healthcare team is a great source of information regarding your medical condition or disability, as well as emotional and general concerns about your wellbeing. Medical staff are trained to give you important information so you should feel comfortable talking to them. As a child your parents talked to your doctor, now you'll have to do it on your own.

Important first steps are:

- **Prepare your questions** before you see your doctor or a member of your healthcare team
- **Ask lots of questions** if you need to
- **Write down** and keep important information with you
- Spend part of your appointment with your doctor on your own without your parents
- **List of medications**
- **Knowledge of scripts**

Your parents/carer will be a good source of information for the rest of your life – but now it's important that you lead the discussions and information exchange. This is good training for the time when you will want to attend appointments on your own as an adult. In the beginning it may be hard – sometimes talking to your doctor can be a scary experience particularly if you need to discuss something embarrassing.

Tips to make it easier:

- Your doctor or member of your healthcare team has seen or heard it before. You are unlikely to be the first patient your doctor has seen with an embarrassing problem. The best thing to do in this situation is to **accept that you may feel uncomfortable** and try your best to put it behind you. You're better off being embarrassed and treated than embarrassed and still sick!
- Your healthcare team is **there to help you**, not judge or punish your behaviour. When you tell them something personal you may think that they will be disappointed with you. Your team is there to keep you healthy so don't be worried that they are going to judge you. It's their job to listen to you non-judgmentally and help you to overcome any concerns or health problems you may have. If you feel like your doctor is judging you then have a chat to your parents/carers about finding a new doctor

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- It's your job to **talk about your concerns in an open and honest way** so that your healthcare team can help you. If you don't chat to them about the hard things they may miss something important in your healthcare. If you're having difficulty approaching a hard issue, try putting it down on paper and give it to your doctor to read
- Your visit is **private and confidential**. Your doctor has a responsibility to keep any information you tell them private

No-one else will find out about your concerns or problems. Your parents/carers don't have to know if you'd prefer they weren't told. The only time this may not apply is if your doctor believes your life or the life of someone else may be at risk. This is discussed in more detail in the *All Your Rights, Including Confidentiality* fact sheet.

Skills for young people

There are certain skills that you need to have in order to effectively communicate with your doctor and healthcare team. It isn't expected that you have all these skills right away, but hopefully by the end of the transition process you will have mastered a majority if not all of these skills.

You will need to be able to:

- Tell your doctor and any other healthcare practitioners about your medical history including current symptoms, your lifestyle and self-care, all within a few minutes so as not to take up too much appointment time
- Ask questions about your condition and its effects on all areas of your life
- Tell your doctor and healthcare team about your needs in all areas of your life and how your condition might effect these areas of life i.e. education
- Follow treatment plans developed by you and your healthcare team
- Be independent in following up referrals and keeping your healthcare team informed about information given in these referrals
- Keep yourself well in areas such as diet, exercise, recreation, medication, hygiene, risk-taking behaviours and get help when you need it
- Be more aware of your physical and emotional health symptoms and needs and how to get help for these before you have a serious medical crisis

- Develop a plan for action when you need emergency care. This can include information such as when to consult with your doctor, what hospital to report to, what care you want or don't want and naming someone who can let your wishes be known in the event that you are unable to
- Recognise that as you become more capable in directing your care that you (not your parents/carers) should:
 - make medical appointments
 - have the most knowledge about your healthcare needs
 - know when to seek guidance in solving problems

Tips for young people

- Be assertive when it comes to your healthcare and needs
- Attend at least some of your appointment without your parent/carer to begin with so you can practice talking to your doctor. Practice will make the process easier and less daunting. During this time work with your doctor on a treatment plan. Once your parent/carer returns try explaining the plan to them. This will help you practice how to discuss your medical history, current symptoms and treatments to any other health professionals as well as learn how to keep you parent/carer informed. This will help them feel confident that you are on top of things
- Ask questions even if you think they are silly; you're better off knowing the answer than wasting time wondering about it or looking for it on the internet
- If you have trouble understanding something try to explain it back to your doctor or healthcare professional. Example: "So what you're saying is this...Is that right?" "...I think I am having trouble understanding." You will be better off in the long run if you acknowledge that you don't understand
- Keep a record of important information with you. Try keeping an information file that includes your medical history, recent test results, healthcare team contact details (including emergency contacts) and other information relevant to your healthcare. Put it in an envelope and take it with you to your appointments
- Your healthcare team wants to help you! Give them all the information they need so they can help you, even if you think it's embarrassing or you want to keep it a secret. Don't keep secrets about your health and well - being from your healthcare team - tell them everything

For more info contact:

The RCH Adolescent Transition Team on **9345 4858/4980**
or find email details and more info on **www.rch.org.au/transition**