



Division for Children & Youth with Special Health Needs Tips for Youth Ages 11-13

Take Charge of Your Health: What You Need to Know



As you get older, you are able to take more responsibility for your own health. These seven tips may give you some ideas for how you can begin to have a discussion with your parents now to get ready. There's a lot of information here and it's ok if you don't use it all. There are also tip sheets for parents with suggestions for how they can help you learn new skills.

Over time, with your parents' support and with practice, you will begin to feel better about asking questions and understanding your health.



In addition to these tips, the following website has lots of checklists, resources and suggestions to help you and your parents talk about your health condition, www.mass.gov/dph/youthtransition.



1. You can begin to learn about your health condition.

- Ask your parents, caregivers, nurses and doctors to explain if you don't understand what they are saying.
- Repeat back to them what you hear to be sure you understand the information.



2. You can learn about your medications.

- Ask what your medicines do, when to take your medicines and how much (dosage) to take.
- It is important to take your medicine at the right times.
- Your parents could help you make a list of your medications.
- You can use an alarm, or your cell phone to help you remember the right times to take your medications.
- By practicing, you may be able to do this without your parents needing to remind you.
- If you need help remembering, you can ask your school nurse, parent or caregiver to help you come up with a plan.
- Taking street drugs or drinking alcohol can affect how well your medications work and can make your health condition worse.
- It's really dangerous to take prescription medicines that aren't yours, so if your healthcare team asks you about this try to be honest. Someone else's asthma inhaler, for example, may look like yours but it may not be right for you.



3. Learn if you have any allergies to any medicines, foods or something you touch, such as latex.

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- Understand how to avoid these things and how to speak up to let someone know about your allergies. For example, if you have a latex allergy, you'll want to ask if the gloves being used are latex.
 - Know what treatment you need if you eat or touch something you're allergic to.
- 4. You can begin to learn the warning signs for when you need to seek medical help right away.**
- Ask your parents what to do if you have any warning symptoms.
 - Ask your parents who to contact when you're not at home.
- 5. ALWAYS keep your emergency information with you.**
- If you have a cell phone, you can have someone help you program in you doctors' and other emergency contacts' numbers.
 - If your phone is a 'smart' phone, there are apps for your emergency contacts and your health conditions, allergies and medicines.
 - If you do not have a cell phone or smart phone, you can carry a flash drive with you that stores your emergency contacts, health conditions, allergies and medications.
 - You can also carry a card with the information you need, in your pocket or wallet.
- 6. You may want to practice learning how to speak with your healthcare team.**
- If talking face-to-face is hard for you, ask your parents to help you write down your questions before your appointment.
 - If your family uses a binder to organize all your medical information, ask if you can help keep it up to date by adding information after appointments.
 - If you are interested, your healthcare team may have suggestions for support groups, videos and books.
- 7. Try to eat healthy foods.**
- If you have a special diet, it's important to follow it.
 - Ask to go food shopping with your parents or caregiver to practice making healthy choices.
 - You can practice reading labels on food, especially if you're allergic to some ingredients.
 - Ask if you can help with getting your meals ready.