

Lesson 9

Healthy behavior

Taking care of
your sexual health.

Health terms

abstinent
circumcision
discharge
foreskin
genitals
gland
groin
hormone
hygiene
over-the-counter
pelvic
self-exam
sexually
transmitted
infection (STI)
symptom
tampon
testicular cancer
toxic shock
syndrome

Student Journal Taking Care of Sexual Health

Journal entry

What are some ways you take care of your health?

My additional notes

Taking Care of Sexual Health

One of the changes of puberty is learning to take care of your sexual health. Keeping your body healthy is important for everyone, and especially for young people who plan to have children one day. The more you know about how your body works, the easier it is to know what's normal for you and to notice any problems.

► Things for Everyone to Know

Hygiene: The word *hygiene* refers to keeping things clean to stay healthy. Teens are active with school, friends, sports, hobbies and lots of other things. When you reach puberty, your body becomes more active inside too. Your glands and hormones cause you to sweat more and can make your skin more oily, so it's important to clean your body more often.

Here are some things to do:

- Bathe or shower every day. Some people need to wash more often than others. Wash with soap and water, and be sure to clean your armpits, feet and between your legs.
- Use deodorant or antiperspirant. Wait until your body cools down after you shower or bathe to put it on.
- Wash your hair often. It can get extra oily when you're going through puberty.
- Wear clean clothes and change your socks and underwear at least once a day.
- Keep the genital area clean and dry.

Risks of having sex: The best choice for teens is to be *abstinent*, or not have sex. Teens who have sex risk getting pregnant or causing a pregnancy. They also risk getting a *sexually transmitted infection (STI)*. An STI is an infection that is passed by sexual contact. STIs can cause uncomfortable symptoms and lead to health problems, including not being able to have children later. All STIs can be treated, and most can be cured. But some STIs stay in your body for life and can continue to cause problems.

1. What questions do you have about the information in this section?

2. What are the most important things everyone your age should know about taking care of their sexual health?

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Taking Care of Sexual Health

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► Taking Care of a Body with a Vagina

Menstrual cramps: Some people get cramps the first day or two of their periods. Cramps can cause a dull ache in the belly area, or can sometimes be sharp and painful. Some things that can help prevent or lessen cramps are getting regular physical activity, eating a well-balanced diet and getting enough rest. A heating pad on the belly and taking over-the-counter pain relievers can also help. If cramps are severe, talk to a doctor.

Tampons: If a person uses tampons during a period, it's important to change the tampon every 3 to 4 hours and wear a pad at night. Tampons have been connected to a rare but serious disease called *toxic shock syndrome*. If a young person feels light-headed and has a high fever, vomiting, diarrhea, aching muscles, headache or a rash that looks like a sunburn while using a tampon, they should tell an adult right away.

Vaginal discharge: A healthy vagina has a normal white, sticky discharge that keeps it clean and protects it from infection.

When to see a doctor: See a doctor for regular checkups. Talk to a parent or a doctor about any of these symptoms:

- Sores on the vagina or vulva
- Heavy discharge from the vagina that itches, burns or smells
- Pain in the pelvic area
- Bleeding that isn't part of a regular period

1. What questions do you have about the information in this section?

2. What are the most important things a person with a vagina should know about taking care of their sexual health?

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Taking Care of Sexual Health

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► Taking Care of a Body with a Penis

Circumcision: At birth, a fold of skin called the *foreskin* covers the tip of the penis. Sometimes the foreskin is removed in a procedure called *circumcision*. Circumcision is done for religious, social or cultural reasons. It has no effect on penis size or how the penis works. People who have a foreskin should gently pull the foreskin back and wash inside the fold when they bathe.

Testicular self-exam: It's important to start checking the testicles once a month starting in high school. *Testicular cancer* is fairly rare, but it is the most common cancer in young people ages 15 to 35. It can be cured 90% of the time when it's found early. To check for any lumps or other changes, roll each testicle between the thumbs and fingers of both hands. Then feel the groin area on both sides for any lumps or swelling.

Protecting the genitals: When playing sports wear an athletic supporter or "jock strap" to protect the genitals. This is a support made out of stretchy material that holds the penis and testicles in close to the body.

When to see a doctor: See a doctor for regular checkups. Talk to a parent or a doctor about any of these symptoms:

- Burning or pain when peeing, or a need to pee often
- Drip or discharge from the penis
- Pain when pulling back the foreskin if the penis is uncircumcised
- Sores, bumps or blisters near or on the penis, testicles or groin area
- Lumps or other changes in the testicles

1. What questions do you have about the information in this section?

2. What are the most important things a person with a penis should know about taking care of their sexual health?
