



Cut the Confusion:
Questions to Ask Your Doctor
at Every Age and Stage of Life

Introduction

Taking care of your health can be challenging. Whether you're an infant, child, teenager, or adult, your body is always changing, and it can be hard to keep up!

At Voyage Healthcare, we know that self-care and regular medical check-ups are two keys to good health.

How can you make the most of each visit with your doctor? The biggest thing you can do is ask a lot of questions.

Here's our guide to questions you should be asking at every age and stage of life. Follow these guidelines to get the most out of your medical care.



Infants (0-1 year)

A lot is going on in the first year, and your baby will develop a variety of motor and verbal skills in infancy. Learn more about [developmental milestones](#) for your infant on the CDC website.

Note: Are you pregnant or a new mom? There's a lot to keep track of for your baby's care, and your own! To learn about prenatal and postpartum care, check out our Complete Prenatal Care Kit, [from Bump to Baby and Beyond!](#)

There are plenty of questions to ask when it comes to infants. Everything from how you should bathe your child, their nutrition, what types of bowel movements they have, their sleep schedule, how their growth and development should look, the safety of the infant, vaccinations, and how to

prep your child for early education.

Visit Schedule: Infants should be seen at one week, two weeks, then two, four, six, nine, and 12 months.

Questions to Ask:

Bathing:

- How should I bathe my baby?
- How can I care for my baby's umbilical cord?

Nutrition:

- Is my baby eating enough?
- If I have questions about breastfeeding, do you have a referral for a lactation consultant?
- If my baby is transitioning to solid foods, how can I help make this transition as smooth as possible?
- When should I begin watching for any allergy concerns?

Bowel Movements:

- Are my baby's diapers regular?
- What are the frequency and consistency of bowel movements as your baby gets older and begins to eat more solid food?

Sleep:

- Are my baby's sleep habits usual?
- How can I keep my infant safe at night?

Growth and Development:

- Is my baby growing normally?
- What developmental milestones should I look for before my child's next appointment?
- How can I aid their growth and development?
- What should I do if I have concerns about my child's growth and development?

Safety:

- How can I make my house safe for a baby?
- How do I [baby-proof](#) my home?

Childcare and Early Learning:

- If I am a working parent, what should I look for in a childcare facility?



Toddlers (1-3 years)

Just like an infant, toddlers grow daily, and if you blink, you might miss something crucial. At **15 months**, your child will probably have a small vocabulary and be able to follow simple directions. By **18 months**, your child may begin to have temper tantrums and display more independence, start walking alone, or eating with a spoon.

The **two-year milestone** brings its joys and frustrations.

Although this milestone can sometimes be known as the "terrible twos," you'll want to, "keep in mind that [...] actions are not acts of defiance directed towards you; [...] developing independence and learning how to express [...] frustration," says Erin Smith at [Parents Magazine](#). Remember, this problematic phase usually ends by age four as children get better at verbally expressing their needs and accomplishing tasks independently.

Nutrition for toddlers is essential, as well as their sleep schedule. Plus, finding out when they need dental care and how to develop relationships are all things you'll want to ask your doctor.

Visit Schedule: As a toddler (1-3 years old), your child should see the doctor at 15 months, 18 months, 2 years, and 3 years. These appointments make for a great time to develop a trusting relationship with one specific provider if you haven't done so already.

Questions to Ask:

Nutrition:

- What should my toddler be eating?
- If my toddler is a picky eater, how can I ensure they are getting all of their nutrients?

Sleep:

- How much should my toddler be sleeping?
- How can I create a good bedtime routine for my toddler?

Dental Care:

- When does my toddler need to start seeing the dentist?

Growth and Development:

- When should my child start to walk?
- What motor skills should they be developing?
- What are normal ranges for height and weight for my child?

Relationships:

- How can I encourage my toddler to develop healthy relationships with family and friends?
- If our family is growing, how can I help my toddler learn to adapt to this new situation?
- How can I encourage sharing and decrease sibling rivalries?

If your family is growing, embrace the opportunity to teach your children how to share and play well with others. Are you looking for parenting resources? An [ECFE class](#) can be a great way to learn new parenting strategies and talk through challenges and solutions with other parents.

Red flags for this stage of life, include no babbling, no gestures by 12 months, no words by 16 months, no phrases by 24 months, and if there is a loss of skill at any point head to your pediatric physician. See the Help Me Grow guide on [why you should refer](#) and [when to refer a child](#) to learn more.



Young Children (3-5 years)

At **three years**, most children understand ideas of, "mine, his, and hers." They can usually dress and undress independently, and can, "talk well enough for strangers to understand most of the time," says the CDC. **Four years** brings some creativity to your child as they usually can tell stories, say their first and last name, hop and stand on one foot, and use scissors.

By **five years old**, most children can distinguish between real and pretend, speak clearly, and use a fork and spoon by themselves.

As your young child begins to grow, you'll want to learn about their nutrition, sleep, growth, development stages, and school preparation when you visit a family medicine provider.

Visit Schedule: Three to five-year-olds should see their doctor bi-annually or annually.

Questions to Ask:

Nutrition:

- Is my child eating a balanced diet?
- What can I do to accommodate their preferences and dietary needs?

Sleep:

- Is my child sleeping enough?
- What is a regular nap schedule for my child?
- How will my child's sleep habits change as they age?
- What should I do if my child has trouble sleeping at night?

Growth and Development:

- How will my child grow?
- How will their coordination improve?
- What new skills should my child develop (like hopping and skipping, throwing a ball, and drawing)?
- What activities can help my child strengthen these abilities?

School Preparation:

- How can I prepare my child to start school?
- What skills does my child need to be school-ready?
- Would my child benefit from an additional year of preschool?
- If I want to enroll my child in a particular program (for example, an immersion school), what steps do I need to take now?

Red flags for young children include extreme separation anxiety, little interest in other children's activity, and difficulty speaking. As a red flag, you might ask, when should I schedule an additional doctor's appointment for my child? See the Help Me Grow website for milestones your child should reach by [three years](#), [four years](#), and [five years](#).



School-Aged Children (6-12 years)

There are a variety of milestones children continue to reach throughout childhood. Development of motor skills, interaction with others, and socialization are all part of this stage of life.

A huge part of growing up is learning how to go from playing alone to spending time with others. You'll also see your child develop more personality as behavioral traits begin to take place.

Stanford Children's Health has a great [list of these developments](#) for school-aged kids, or we suggest, you talk to your doctor to learn what to look for at each age.

Beyond nutrition, dental care, sleeping, growth, and development, school-age children also will need to have their learning and cognition checked, as well as their mental health. Keep on reading for questions to ask your doctor about your school-age child.

Visit Schedule: Children should see their doctor annually once they reach school age (or 5 years old).

Questions to Ask:

Nutrition:

- How can I encourage healthy eating and snacking?
- What can I do to help my child develop good dietary habits?

Dental Care:

- Should my child get orthodontics?
- Do we need to see the dentist ever 4-6 months?

Sleep:

- How much should my child be sleeping?
- What can I do to encourage healthy sleep habits?
- How can I help my child develop a consistent sleep schedule?
- What should I do if my child regularly seems overtired or lethargic?

Growth and Development:

- What age will my child go through a growth spurt?
- What motor skills should my child be developing?
- What activities can aid their growth and development?
- What developmental milestones should I look for before my child's next appointment?

Learning and Cognition:

- How can I support my child's education?

- How can I encourage good school habits?
- What indicators mean my child may have special needs?
- What resources do I have if I have questions about my child's learning and cognition?

Mental Health:

- What normal behavior fluctuations should I expect to see from my child?
- What sets mental health disorders apart from regular ups and downs?
- How can I teach my child about mental health?
- When might my child need additional help?

Red Flags for school-aged children can include acute injuries, speech and language difficulties, and difficulty hearing. Vision issues can also become present. Your child will want to have sound and vision tests completed, as well as developmental screenings.

As your child begins to grow and develop, issues from autism spectrum disorders might become present. View these [developmental red flags](#). If your child is demonstrating any of these tendencies, it's best to take them to their physician.



Adolescents (13-18 years)

Pediatricians and family medicine practitioners can help teens with a variety of health issues, from sports injuries to colds. Your teen's primary care doctor is also an essential resource for

referrals to any specialists your child might benefit from seeing. Voyage Healthcare president, Dr. Scott Colson, says, "the teen years can be tough." Among the most common issues teens face are psychological disorders like anxiety and depression. At Voyage Healthcare, we frequently see teenagers for these concerns and if needed, we can refer you and your teen to a network of other care providers for any concerns we cannot manage here.

Beyond mental health, adolescents will want to have their nutrition monitored, check into dental care including orthodontics, learn about sexual health, manage acute illnesses and injuries, and learn what vaccines they will need.

Visit Schedule: Your teen should see the doctor annually.

The teen years are a great time to develop a trusted relationship with one specific provider, if you don't have one already. "There are many difficult conversations and frequent questions that teens may feel best asking someone they know and trust," says Dr. Colson.

Note - Children usually start seeing the doctor alone for at least part of their visit by age 12, so expect this with your adolescent. Visiting a practitioner alone allows your child to build a confidential relationship with their doctor.

Questions to Ask:

Nutrition:

- How can I help my teenager eat healthily?
- Is my teen at a healthy weight for their age and size?

Dental Care:

- My teen doesn't want braces, what are other options?
- How frequently does my teenager need to see the dentist?

Sleep:

- My child has been sleeping more, when should I become concerned about their sleeping habits?

Growth and Development:

- What vaccines does my teen need?
- What is Meningococcal conjugate vaccine (MenACWY)?
- What does a Tdap protect against?
- How do I make sure my teen is receiving enough physical activity?

Sexual/Reproductive Health:

- When should my teen receive an HPV vaccine?
- How can our family set rules more effectively?

Mental Health:

- My child has had some behavioral changes should I be worried about drugs and alcohol use?
- How do I help my teen regain interest in their favorite activities?
- When should I get my teen checked for depression?

Questions for Teens to Ask:

Note: These questions are designed for teens to ask their doctors. Parents may also wish to ask these questions.

Nutrition:

- What should I be eating?
- How can I ensure I am getting all of my nutrients?
- What should I know about eating disorders?

Sleep:

- How much sleep do I need?
- If I often don't feel sleepy until later in the night but have to get up early for school or work, how can I improve the quality of my sleep?

Growth and Development:

- When will I complete puberty?
- When will I finish growing?
- What developmental milestones should I look for before my next appointment?
- How can I aid healthy growth and development?
- How can I care for my body as I finish growing?

Sexual/Reproductive Health:

- How can I care for my sexual health?
- What do I need to know about birth control?
- What are sexually transmitted infections?
- What is the HPV vaccine and am I up to date?

- What is safe sex and how can I practice safe sex?
- What should I do if I have concerns about my sexual and reproductive health?

Mental Health:

- How can I care for my mental health?
- I've been feeling sad and down, am I depressed?
- I'm anxious about going to school, is there something to help with my anxiety?
- How is mental illness different from regular mood swings and fluctuations in behavior?
- What should I do if I am worried about my psychological health?

Red Flags for a teenager can be anything from a sports injury or an acute injury to an illness. If there are concerns about mental health make sure to see your provider for more information and steps to take if you want to see a specialist.

Learn more about what questions you and your teen should be asking a provider with this helpful [previsit questionnaire](#) from Bright Futures and the American Academy of Pediatrics.



20s and 30s

In your 20s, you may be considered an adult, but this doesn't mean you stop reaching developmental milestones. The prefrontal cortex doesn't finish developing until about age 25. Early adults can take

advantage of this time to learn new things and practice new skills.

Your 20s and 30s is also a great time to establish good habits, from exercise to diet to mental health. Your doctor is trained to ask about your health choices, including your use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. Your clinic is a safe, non-judgemental space to discuss your health habits, and honest answers help your provider give you the best medical care possible. When you visit the doctor, make sure you're up to date on your STI tests and immunizations (including your HPV booster and annual flu shot). Catching problems sooner are the best way to prevent them from becoming more dangerous.

Have you scheduled your annual physical? Regular check-ups are critical components of preventive care, and early adulthood is a great time to start these ideal habits within nutrition, dental care, sleep, and so much more. It's also important to [learn about healthcare plans](#), as you'll need to move to your own program by age 26.

Visit Schedule: Adults should see their [family doctor](#) annually.

Questions to Ask:

Nutrition:

- How can I improve my diet and practice healthy eating?
- What's a good BMI for my body type?
- Do I need to take any vitamins or supplements?

Dental Care:

- Do I really need to see the dentist every six months?

Sleep:

- According to the [National Sleep Foundation](#), adults need between seven and nine hours of sleep.
- How can I find the amount of sleep that's right for me?
- How can I improve the quality of my sleep?

Cognition:

- How can I care for my brain as a young adult?
- How can diet, exercise, and other activities improve my brain health?

Mental Health:

- How can I care for my mental health in my 20s and 30s?
- When is it time to seek help for my mental health?

Sexual/Reproductive Health:

- Am I up to date on the HPV vaccine?
- Am I up to date on STI screenings?
- What is the right birth control for me?
- How can I care for my reproductive health?
- What do I need to know if I am considering having children?

Note for Women: When should I see an [OB/GYN](#)? If I am pregnant or may become pregnant, what prenatal and postpartum care do you offer? When should I get a pap smear? What STIs am I more likely to contract? How can I prevent STIs while in a relationship?

Note for Men: Are you having unprotected sex with multiple partners? Do you trade sex for money or drugs or have sex partners who do? Have you ever been treated for a sexually transmitted infection?

Family Health History:

- Are there specific conditions that I am at a higher risk of developing because of my family health history?
- If I have a family, am I at risk of passing health conditions like genetic disorders down to my children?

Red Flags and common concerns in your 20s and 30s may include pregnancy, STIs, infertility, mental health, eating disorders, stress, and high blood pressure. It's best to ask your doctor when you notice something changing about your body or if you're in a high-stress environment.



40s and 50s

In your 40s and 50s, it's time to focus on maintaining your health and fitness.

Is the life you're living giving you the health results you want? Middle age is a great time to invest in your health - including physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being. Make sure you are cultivating healthy habits so you can make the most of each day.

Screenings are also an essential part of preventive care. As you enter middle age, preventive care is a significant way to minimize health issues. For example, starting at age 50, all adults should be screened for colon cancer. Talk to your medical provider to learn what's right for you with nutrition, dental care, sleep schedules, how you can stay mentally active, your family health history, and more.

Visit Schedule: Adults should see their doctor annually.

Questions to Ask:

Nutrition:

- Am I in need of more nutrients?
- Do I need to cut down on my salt or processed food intake?
- Do I need to take any vitamins or supplements?

- What's the best way to maintain a healthy BMI?
- Is it too late to stop smoking?

Dental Care:

- Life is pretty busy, can I go to an annual cleaning?

Sleep:

- How much sleep do I need as an adult?
- If I experience problems sleeping, what is the best way to improve the quality of my sleep?
- How do I know if I have a sleep disorder?

Cognition:

- How can I stay mentally sharp?
- Are there any activities I can do to help improve my brain function?
- What's the best way to take care of my brain as an adult?

Mental Health:

- How can I care for my mental health in my 40s and 50s?
- What are some strategies to cope with significant life changes I may experience?
- When is it time to seek help for my mental health?
- When might medication be helpful?

Sexual/Reproductive Health:

- Should I stick to the same contraception method as I age?
- How will my fertility change as I age?
- How will my odds (or my partner's odds) of pregnancy change?
- For Women: When will I experience menopause? How will this affect my sexual health and my risk for conditions like osteoporosis? When do I need a mammogram?
- For men: How will my fertility change as I age? When should I see a specialist for erectile dysfunction or another sexual health issue?

Family Health History:

- What can I do to decrease my risks for diseases that run in my family? What warning signs should I watch for in regards to prevailing conditions in my family?

Red flags for 40 to 50 year olds include if you haven't been to a doctor in a few years, you should probably make an appointment. Other issues include developing a chronic illness, changes in your family health history, and there has been a change since the last time you saw your primary care physician. Learn more about preventive care when you view these [health prevention guidelines](#) created by Johns Hopkins Medicine.



60s and Beyond

Americans are living longer than ever before. Older adults should also pay particular attention to their brain health. Getting regular exercise, keeping your blood pressure low, and not smoking can all decrease your risk for Dementia and Alzheimers.

As you age, you may find that your activities change dramatically. Self-care is a great start.

Just like in your 40s and 50s, it's also important to talk to your provider about your family health history. Knowing if a specific disease runs in the family can help you decrease your risk or reduce symptoms. It's also essential to get screened periodically for cognition, and skin diseases like melanoma, and osteoporosis, to name a few.

We suggest that in your sixties and beyond, you'll want to be on top of your mental health. As a spokesperson for [American Heart Association](#), Dr. Gerald Fletcher, says that "we haven't yet been able to quantify the health effects of mental stress, but it's a tremendous problem, particularly as people age." So keeping up with your daily activities, even after retirement, it's essential to one's overall health and well-being that you ensure your eating and sleep habits are ideal for your age.

Visit Schedule: Older Adults should have annual check-ins with their physicians.

Questions to Ask:

Nutrition:

- How can I change my eating habits to improve my diet?
- How can I reduce my risk of type II diabetes?
- How can I create a meal plan that's friendly to my wallet and my body?

Sleep:

- How can I expect my sleep habits to change as I age?
- If I'm having trouble getting to sleep or staying asleep, what can I do to get the rest I need?
- Are there sleep-related disorders like sleep apnea that are more likely as I age?
- When should I consult a specialist?

Physical Health:

- What aches and pains are usual as I age?
- What aches and pains may indicate a more severe condition like arthritis? Am I at risk for heart disease or [diabetes](#)?
- If I'd like to start exercising more, how can I ramp up safely?
- My feet are starting to hurt, should I get that checked out?
- Does Voyage Healthcare offer [podiatry](#)?
- Are there any precautions I should take with workouts?

Cognition:

- How can I care for my brain as an older adult?
- What can I do to stay mentally sharp and engaged?
- I feel like I'm losing my memory, should I go to the doctor?
- What is typical of memory loss and what isn't?
- If something feels off, when should I go back to the doctor?

Mental Health:

- What mental health challenges should I understand as I age?
- Is it possible to get depressed as I age?
- What's normal, and when is it time to get help?
- Do you have resources to help me care for my mental health?

Sexual Health:

- How can I care for my sexual health as I age?
- What can I do about low sex drive?

Note for Women: What can I do about painful intercourse? How can I care for my sexual health after menopause?

Note for Men: What can I do about erectile dysfunction?

Family Health History:

- How can I minimize my risk factors for conditions that run in my family?
- Are there additional screenings I should schedule because of my family health history?

Preventative Care:

- When should I have my skin checked?
- I see this mole getting bigger, is that an age spot or is it melanoma?
- Do I need any preventive screenings or tests?
- What immunizations should I be up to date on and are there new ones I should take as I age?
- Should I get a flu shot annually?

Red Flags for older adults include sight, hearing, strength, heart, or memory troubles. You should contact your doctor and schedule an appointment right away if any of these issues come to light. Learn more about what to [expect in your 60s as you get older!](#)



Voyage Healthcare Can Help You Through All Stages of Life

At Voyage Healthcare, we provide personal, quality care for all ages and stages of life. Whether you're infant or you've accomplished quite a bit in life, we can help you through any type of issue or problem.

Schedule an appointment at any of our [five convenient locations](#).

[REQUEST AN APPOINTMENT](#)