

FACT SHEET

What women in their teens and 20s need to know

BARRY YEE/Liaison International



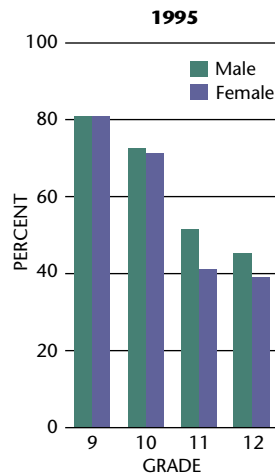
More than 40 percent of adolescents have **acne** that is severe enough to be treated by a doctor, but for most people, washing each day with a mild soap keeps acne tolerable.

Pick your gynecologist carefully. You should be able to ask questions, understand what tests are being performed and why, keep your medical records private, and retain the right to refuse any treatment or advice. Do some research: call a local college or university clinic and ask for recommendations; talk to your mom and friends about their favorite gynecologists. You can check your doctor's background on the American Medical Association's Web site at <http://www.ama-assn.org/> using the "Doctor Finder."

When it comes to sports, young women are no longer sitting on the sidelines. And with the rising numbers of female athletes, doctors are seeing more **knee injuries**. Women are two to eight times more likely than men to develop a tear in the anterior cruciate ligament of the knee. Researchers at the University of Michigan Medical Center and the Cincinnati Sports Medicine Clinic found that these injuries often occur during ovulation—suggesting that estrogen may play a role.

In 1995 nearly 7 percent of young women ages 15 to 19 tested for **CHLAMYDIA** at family-planning clinics were infected with this sexually transmitted disease that can lead to permanent infertility. Among women ages 20 to 24, the rate was 4 percent. Chlamydia can be treated with one dose of the right antibiotic.

U.S. STUDENTS ENROLLED IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION



SOURCE: Youth Risk Behavior Survey

According to the 1997 U.S. *Shape of the Nation* report, 47 states have mandates for physical education. Illinois is the only state that requires daily **physical education** for all students, kindergarten through 12th grade; Alabama and Washington require daily physical education for all students through eighth grade. The majority of high school students take physical education for only one year between ninth and 12th grades.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that although **smoking rates among teens** dropped during the past 20 years, over the past five years they have begun to rise. In 1992 only 17 percent of girls in their senior year of high school said they smoked. By 1997 the number of high school girls who smoked was 35 percent. The CDC has projected that more than five million young people alive today will die prematurely from a smoking-related disease.

CHECKUP

Essential medical exams for women in their teens and 20s

✓ PELVIC EXAM AND PAP TEST

When you turn 18 or become sexually active, it's time to schedule a pelvic examination and Pap test. Nobody loves going in for these, but remember, neither should be painful, and they could save your life.

During the exam, your doctor will first look at your external genitalia for signs of irritation or disease. Then she (or he) will use a tool called a speculum to separate your vaginal walls. Next, your doctor will perform a Pap test to check your cervix for abnormal cells that could indicate a precancerous condition. She will scrape cells from your cervix and cervical canal in a quick and painless procedure. (If anything ever hurts during the exam, tell your doctor immediately.) The Pap test is particularly important to have if you are or have been sexually active: it can help diagnose human papillomavirus (HPV), a common sexually transmitted disease that can cause cervical cancer.

After removing the speculum, your doctor will feel your ovaries, uterus and fallopian tubes to make sure they are healthy. She may then perform a rectal exam to check for abnormalities in the wall separating the rectum and vagina.

Most doctors recommend a pelvic exam once a year, and the American Cancer Society suggests a Pap test be performed during your first three pelvic exams. If the results are normal, ask your doctor how often you should schedule future Pap tests. **COST: Pelvic exam \$40-\$100; Pap test \$20-\$60. Usually covered by insurance.**

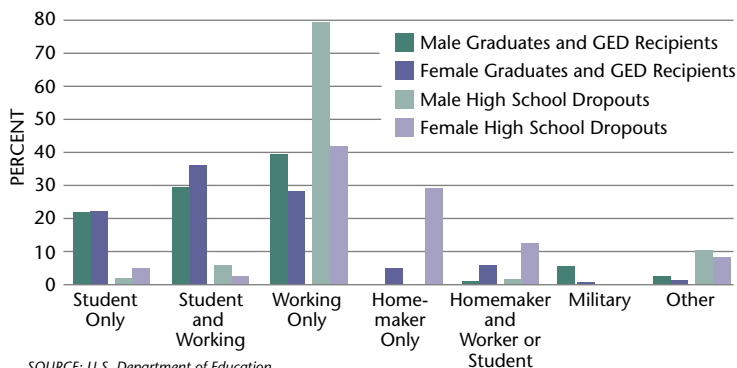


BETH PHILLIPS

In the 1970s **birth-control pills** were thought to increase your risk of a heart attack or stroke by causing blood clots, but modern pills pack lower doses of synthetic hormones and are considered highly effective and safe. Yet the long-term effects are largely a mystery, and there may still be some risk involved. Schedule a checkup within three months of taking your first prescription.

Your doctor needs to monitor your blood pressure and watch for side effects such as headaches, hair growth and spotty menstrual bleeding. You should also ask your doctor whether other forms of hormonal contraceptives—implants or injections—are right for you.

LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

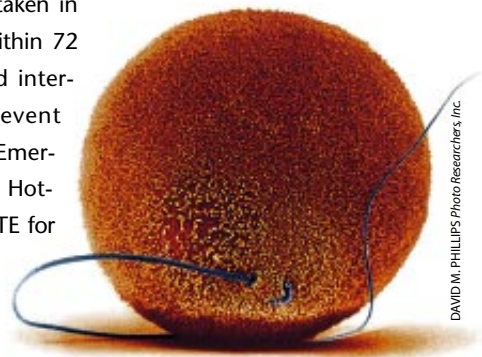


SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1994

66% of sexually transmitted diseases occur in people under age 25. (Institute of Medicine, 1997)

Nearly four in 10 teen pregnancies end in abortion. In 1997 the Food and Drug Administration confirmed that six brands of oral contraceptives are safe and effective as **emergency contraception**. If the pills are taken in the proper dosage within 72 hours of unprotected intercourse, they can prevent pregnancy. Call the Emergency Contraception Hotline at 888-NOT-2-LATE for more information.

48% of women between the ages of 15 and 44 have had at least one unplanned pregnancy. (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1998)



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✓ BLOOD PRESSURE TEST

This is as quick and easy as a test gets: your blood pressure should be checked every time you go to the doctor, without your even having to ask. Your blood pressure should be below 140/90. Make sure you are tested annually if you're African-American, are overweight or have a family history of high blood pressure. The American Heart Association recommends that everyone have a blood pressure test once every two years. **COST: Included in a routine visit to the doctor and free at many pharmacies.**

✓ SKIN EXAM

Have a doctor examine your skin for irregular moles or skin color. Your doctor may suggest you see a dermatologist if he finds anything suspicious. The American Cancer Society recommends an exam once every three years between the ages of 20 and 40. Call 800-ACS-2345 to learn more about skin cancer. **COST: Included in a routine visit to the doctor.**

✓ CHOLESTEROL TEST

You might not be thinking about cholesterol yet, but high levels of cholesterol increase your risk of heart disease, so find out what your level is now. The National Cholesterol Education Program—run by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI)—recommends testing once every five years for people 20 years of age and older. Your primary care doctor will take a blood sample for analysis and may suggest a low-fat diet and exercise if your cholesterol level is too high.

To learn more about cholesterol and your heart, check out the NHLBI site at <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/nhlbi/nhlbi.htm> on the World Wide Web. **COST: \$20-\$35**

✓ BREAST EXAM

It's not too soon to be aware of breast cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends that you examine your breasts for unusual lumps or bumps once a month right after your period ends and have your gynecologist examine your breasts every three years once you turn 20. To learn more about breast self-exams, see <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/bc-and-wh/womens-health/exam/default.htm#breastexam> on the World Wide Web. If there is a history of breast cancer in your family, ask your doctor about when to start having mammograms. **COST: Included in a routine visit to the doctor; often accompanies a pelvic exam.**

✓ TESTING FOR STDs

Ask your physician about being tested for the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) as well as other common sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), such as chlamydia, herpes, gonorrhea and hepatitis B.

Be aware, however, that the results of the HIV test will go on your medical records permanently if it is not done anonymously; the outcome of this test could affect your ability to obtain insurance coverage later on. To find anonymous testing sites for HIV, call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National HIV and AIDS Hotline at 800-342-2437. There's also a hotline specifically for other STDs: the National STD Hotline at 800-227-8922. **COST: \$30-\$100**

✓ DENTAL EXAM

Visit the dentist regularly to have your teeth cleaned and examined for cavities. **COST: \$60-\$200**

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