



PREPARING FOR THE TRANSITION FROM PEDIATRIC TO ADULT HEALTH CARE: PARENT GUIDE

Parents are familiar with the many transitions their children experience as they grow – their first steps, first words, first day of school, and last day of high school. But what about the last visit to the pediatrician or the first visit to an adult doctor? What about the planning that might make that transition less stressful and more successful? Many parents and youth do not consider this transition until it is suddenly upon them. And this may be even more true for youth and young adults with special health care needs who use the health care system more often.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), along with the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) and the American College of Physicians (internal medicine doctors) recently updated their recommendations for this important transition. In 2018 they published “[Supporting the Transition of Health Care from Adolescence to Adulthood in the Medical Home](#).” This new clinical report offers guidance for pediatric and adult providers to help youth and parents gain skills to manage their own health as youth move to adult care.

The AAP advises that parents and their doctors begin to plan for transition as early as age 12. They also advise parents to plan for the move to an adult doctor between ages 14 and 18. Doctors and parents can assist their youth and young adults to manage their own health and health care. These skills include making an appointment and filling a prescription. It also includes knowing their personal and family health histories and asking questions during an office visit. During these years, transition planning could include asking the youth questions about their skills to manage their own health and making and sharing a medical summary and emergency care plan. The planning should include discussing changes in privacy and consent that happen at age 18 and preparing a plan of care with youth on their transition goals. The goal is to have this transition happen sometime between age 18 and the early 20s.

Health care transition may be different for youth and young adults with special needs. That includes those with serious chronic medical or behavioral needs and those with developmental or intellectual disabilities. These young adults may require more in-depth planning and on-going support because a variety of specialists can be involved. If the young adult will require help with health care decisions, legal plans for this must be in place by age 18.

Parents have a key role to play in helping their youth to learn to manage their health on their own. Below are a few questions that parents can ask their child’s doctors:

1. When does my child start to meet with you alone for part of the visit to become more independent in their health care?
2. What does my child need to learn to get ready for adult health care? Do you have a checklist of self-care skills that my child needs to learn?
3. Can I work with you to prepare a medical summary and emergency care plan for my child?
4. Before my child turns 18, what information about privacy and consent do we need to learn about? If my child needs help making health decisions, where can I get information about this?
5. At what age does my child need to change to a new doctor for adults?
6. Do you know any adult doctors for my child to transfer to?

More information about transition to adult health care for youth, parents and guardians, and health care clinicians can be found at www.gottransition.org.

The AAP, AAFP, and ACP would like all youth to be as ready and able as possible to manage their own health care needs and to navigate health care services throughout their lives. To build self-care skills, a structured process of planning achieved through a partnership between doctors, youth, and parents is key.