

Getting The Health Care You Need: Section 2

When To Talk To Or See A Health Professional

You can make good decisions about your health and your family's health. To make good health decisions, you need to know the following:

- how to treat yourself or your family,
- how to practice preventive health care to stay healthy,
- the difference between emergency and non-emergency situations, and
- how to make and keep an appointment with a health professional.

Regular Checkups/Preventive Care

Do you have regular *checkups* with your doctor and dentist even when you are not having problems? If you do, then you are getting *preventive* health care. Checkups tell health professionals about your health. If they find a problem, then they can help you.



Talk to your health professional about how often to have checkups. Most people should see a doctor once a year and a dentist every six months for checkups. Babies usually have checkups more often.

During a checkup, a doctor will examine you. The doctor may also do tests that screen for medical problems like high blood pressure, diabetes, and high cholesterol. Doctors may give you shots to prevent flu, tetanus, hepatitis, and other diseases. During a dental checkup, a dentist will examine your teeth, gums, and tongue, and a dental professional will clean your teeth.

Preventive care is more than having checkups. Preventive care is also how you take care of yourself between checkups. For example, you use sun block on your skin before spending time in the sun. You brush your teeth twice a day and use floss to keep your teeth and gums healthy.

Getting The Health Care You Need: Section 2, continuedEmergency Care

It is important to know the difference between health emergencies and non-emergencies. Sometimes people have very serious health problems that need immediate treatment by a health professional. Examples of emergencies are *swallowing poison, having a very high fever, losing a lot of blood, breaking a bone, or having a heart attack*. People with these kinds of serious problems need help right away. Someone may have to call an ambulance for emergency care. Paramedics or EMTs will come to treat the patient right away. They will also take the patient to the hospital if needed. You can also get emergency help at an immediate care center or hospital emergency room.



People can also have pain or accidents with their teeth. They should call a dentist right away if they have bad tooth pain or if a tooth breaks or is knocked out.

In an emergency, there are things you can do to help. For example, if your tooth is knocked out, put your tooth in a glass of milk and take it with you to the dentist. The dentist may be able to fix it. If someone swallows poison or too much medicine, take the bottle of poison or medicine with you to the hospital. Then the doctors will know how to help.

Getting The Health Care You Need: Section 2, continued

Self-Care And Non-Emergency Care

People can often treat small health problems themselves. For example, if you fall and hurt your ankle, you can put ice and a bandage on your ankle.

People often have things at home to treat small health problems. You may have bandages, ice packs, heating pads, and *over-the-counter medications* in your home. Over-the-counter medications are medications that you can buy without a prescription. These include pain and fever medications (like aspirin, Tylenol, and Advil), cold and allergy medications, cough medications, and antiseptics. You can ask a pharmacist which over-the-counter medicines to buy and how to use them.



If your problem does not get better or gets worse after you try to treat it yourself, then you should talk to or see a doctor. For example, if your ankle does not get better after you put ice and a bandage on it, then you should call your doctor. The doctor may examine you and do tests. The doctor will tell you what to do to feel better. You should follow all of the doctor's instructions. If you still don't get better, you should call the doctor again.

Making And Keeping An Appointment With A Health Professional

If you want to see a health professional, you might have to make an *appointment*. When you have an appointment, the health professional knows you are coming and will have time to see you. If you can't keep your appointment, then you should call right away. Health professionals want to know if you are not coming in.

Sometimes you don't have to make an appointment. Some clinics let patients walk in and wait to see the health professional who is in the clinic that day.

