As you know, life can get pretty complicated for teens given the range of physical and emotional changes they go through. Getting teens to talk about what's going on with them, especially with a doctor or another health-care professional, is crucial to keeping them healthy and safe from substance abuse.

This latest installment of Heads Up from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and Scholastic provides important information for teens on how to talk to doctors about sensitive medical and emotional issues, and to establish positive patterns for dealing with health issues in the future.

Talking with doctors and health-care professionals is crucial for teens dealing with a drug problem, and helps those who are not abusing drugs from starting. I urge you to share this Heads Up article with your students, and I thank you for working with NIDA to bring this important information about teen health to your class.

Sincerely,

Nora D. Volkow, M.D.
Director of NIDA
Creating a Personal Health Journal

Face it: As a teenager, you’re going through more changes now than at any other period in your life outside of infancy. A personal health journal is a great way to keep track of all that’s going on with you as you learn more about yourself and your health.

A health journal is great for recording things like:
- what’s happening with your body, e.g., how you are feeling, symptoms, body changes.
- questions and/or concerns you have about your health.
- questions and/or concerns you have about health issues, such as drug abuse, alcohol and tobacco, and teen sex.
- your moods, feelings, and thoughts, and how you think they might be connected to your health.

While your journal is personal and private, it’s helpful to refer to it to share facts when you visit your doctor or other health-care professionals. The more information you give your doctor, the better he or she will be able to help you. Also, as a patient, you have a right to ask questions that concern you; referring to a journal is a great way to cover your concerns.

Tips to Get You Started

GET A NOTEBOOK THAT SUITS YOU: Choose a notebook that you can carry comfortably. You might want to bring the journal to medical appointments to refer to when you talk with your doctor, or to use for taking notes during your visit. The journal can be especially helpful if you move, change doctors, or are hospitalized for any reason.

COMPILE YOUR VITALS: Write down as much of your medical history as you know. Ask your family and/or doctor for anything you’re not sure about. Write down any medications/drugs you are currently taking, allergies, and any illnesses in your immediate family. There’s a helpful form you can download at www.ama-assn.org/ama/upload/mm/39/periodic.pdf, which you can fill out and use for getting down the basics.

GET IT OUT: Use the journal to record any questions and concerns about health issues, such as alcohol, tobacco, drugs, physical development, sex, eating or weight issues. Also write down any emotional issues you may be dealing with, such as problems at school, difficulties with family and friends, and anything you’re concerned about.

NOTE CONNECTIONS between your health and your feelings.

UPDATE YOUR JOURNAL REGULARLY: Make sure you date your entries and also note the time of day.

KEEP TRACK of upcoming health appointments as well as follow-up doctor instructions. Use your journal to make notes of discussions with and advice from your doctor.