

# A healthy puberty

Is your pharmacy teenage-friendly? From issues such as nutrition and skin care to drug use and depression, *RP* looks at how pharmacists can best offer assistance and advice for those going through the difficult puberty years.

By Christine Brown-Paul.

Puberty can be an unsettling time for a young person. It can also be an exciting period as they move from childhood to adulthood and take on all the rights and responsibilities that come with being an adult.

Puberty starts at around 10 years of age for girls and 12 for boys, give or take a year or so. Physical changes can be seen at around 10 to 14 years for most girls and around 11 to 15 years for most boys.

Many emotional changes also happen around puberty for both boys and girls and include mood swings, energy changes and feelings of self-consciousness and anxiety.

## Contraception and sexual health

One area in which the community pharmacy has always been involved is the provision of advice and the sales of requisites for family planning. Many pharmacies have also extended their services to running a pregnancy-testing service.

Pharmacists can play an important role in efforts to improve access for young women to emergency contraception (EC) and help them obtain EC in a timely manner, before they need it, or within 120 hours of unprotected sexual intercourse.

Pharmacists can provide EC without a prescription to customers aged 18 and over and they can refer women aged under 18 to healthcare providers to obtain a prescription. Pharmacists can educate teen clients about EC by providing educational materials such as brochures and wallet cards, as well as inserts with prescriptions.

Despite the fact that EC, also known as the morning-after pill, has been available for some time, many teens still face barriers in obtaining the medication – a safe and effective way to prevent up to 74 per cent of pregnancies following the failure of birth control, or after unprotected sex.

According to a La Trobe University

survey, teenagers score a 'B' for overall knowledge of sexual health and contraception.

"They're not doing badly but there's still room for improvement," said Professor Anthony Smith, Deputy Director of the Australian Research Centre for Sex Health and Society, which conducted the survey.

He is concerned about some of the emerging trends and changes in data from many aspects of the fourth National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health.

"Youth cultures are diversifying," Professor Smith said. "We are not seeing broad general trends but changes that are gender- and year-level specific and this must be monitored."

"Mum still knows best when it comes to giving information and advice, as well as female friends and the internet, but there's huge provision for youth-friendly health services – including pharmacies – to fill a vital gap in information."

The research team surveyed around 3,000 Year 10 and 12 students from Catholic, independent and government schools about sex in a bid to glean more about their sexual behaviour and knowledge of sexual health.

The report card scores their knowledge of HIV at a B+, the highest rate of all the scores, but warns that HIV knowledge is declining slightly.

On the upside, knowledge about sexually transmissible infections and hepatitis is improving, although a majority of those surveyed believe it is possible to be vaccinated against hepatitis C.

## Puberty blues

World Suicide Day (September 10) and RU OK? Day (September 11) highlighted the alarming statistics surrounding suicide and teenagers. Both events are important in raising awareness about the fact that teen suicide rates have escalated in recent years for females (3.4 per cent in 2009 to 8.3 per cent in 2012), and remained consistent in males (9.3 per cent from 2009 to 2012).

The suicide rate for young people aged 15-24 years appears to increase with geographical remoteness or socio-economic disadvantage, while depressive disorders are the most common identifiable risk factor for suicide in teens.

To combat these trends, the Centre for Emotional Health at Macquarie University has launched a new online treatment program, Chilled Plus, for 12 to 17 year olds with depression/anxiety. Chilled Plus is available over the internet, allowing teens to access very low cost treatment anonymously, including teens in rural areas.

The program features eight online modules, each supported by interaction with a qualified therapist, and incorporates the latest research and techniques in working with motivation and negative emotions.

## Skin care: what teenagers want

When it comes to attracting teenagers to your pharmacy, it pays to know what they want in terms of products and advice, particularly for skin care.

Appearance and facial skin are among teens' top 'life priorities'. A study by skin care brand Dermalogica found that skin issues ranked third behind school work and friends when it came to life priorities, ranking higher than having fun and enjoying life.

Each year sees more companies delivering innovative new acne-fighting products. Unfortunately, the popularity of products targeting teen skin has also brought with it a negative trend – self-diagnosis.

"One obvious trend is how much more knowledgeable teens [and their parents] are about the type of products they want to buy," said Tess Stolarchuk, PR and Media Manager for Alpha-H Skincare. "They'll see a review online, or read about a new ingredient on a blog and think that it's what they need, although sometimes this isn't the case, as the product may not be suitable for their skin."

However, a positive trend to emerge from this increasing

knowledge is the number of teens turning to teen skin products focusing on natural ingredients.

"Over the past 12-18 months there has been a definite shift towards using natural ingredients to treat teen skin," Ms Stolarchuk said.

Beauty brand Natio's National Trainer Linda Riddell agreed, adding: "Increasingly, we have noticed that teens are choosing gentler, more natural skin care alternatives to help control excess oil and maintain a healthy moisture balance. Natio has developed a plant-based skin care range to support problem skin, dispelling the myth that acne care must be harsh to be effective."

With surveys showing that 85 per cent of teenagers suffer from acne, a big market exists for products to help address this particular pain of growing, albeit a demanding market.

"Teenagers want results fast," La Clinica For Skin & Body owner and founder Rita-Marie Hopfiner said. "They don't want it to be known that they're using skin care products for their problem skin. Teenagers need products that are affordable, effective and don't produce secondary, negative side effects."

Clearasil Brand Manager Margaret Hooper said: "Teenagers are at the forefront of any new trend, so we find they will be the first to discover and try the latest product on the market."

## Role of the pharmacist

*RP* asked practising Clinical Psychologist Stephanie Allen about some of the most common issues facing teenagers where pharmacists could be of assistance.

She said these included:

- Addiction – teenagers may seek to stockpile medication, or buy for the purpose of abusing (or their potential for being abused), for example, codeine or benzodiazepine.
- Diet and body image – teenagers may seek out laxatives, diet products/pills, etc.
- Sleep – teenagers may seek out various sleep aids at pharmacies, eg,

natural remedies or sleeping pills.

- Exercise – teenagers may seek out products such as protein supplements.
- Sexual health – teenagers may seek out products such as condoms or the morning-after pill.

“Teenagers may have inadequate parental supervision/guidance about wise health and lifestyle choices, and pharmacy staff are in a great position to bridge this gap,” Ms Allen said.

“They may have a lack of education/knowledge about particular products, their use and the consequences of misuse [eg, laxatives, diet pills, analgesics].”

Pharmacists could intervene in several ways, she said.

“Hold discussions with teenagers at the pharmacy – ask teenagers themselves what issues they are faced with, and ask them about their knowledge of particular health-related issues,” Ms Allen said.

“It’s good to provide teenagers with written information [eg, pamphlets and handouts covering health-related issues]. These could either be general handouts [eg, government health advice about skin cancer and sun safety], or those specifically developed by a pharmacy association. The written information could be available in the pharmacy, at GP practices, or other medical and health-related practices.

“There is also the possibility of visiting teenagers, for example, by doing an education session at their school.”

### Engaging with teenagers

Ms Allen said pharmacists could engage with teenagers by conceptualising a framework based on the word SUPPORT:

- Seek feedback from teenagers about whether they would like support from pharmacy staff and, if so, to what degree. For example, some teenagers may be looking for support as well as answers to health-related questions; some may not be interested or willing (particularly if they receive such support from their GP); some may not need support.
- Understand the needs of teenagers, eg, by having comprehensive knowledge about what issues they are commonly faced with. Avoid over-involvement and encourage autonomy – teenagers are learning

to become adults, and a big part of this is taking an active role in looking after their health and wellbeing. Pharmacy staff ideally should aim to strike a balance between asking too many questions and not enough. This will always depend on the situation, the people involved and the issue the teenager is experiencing.

- Provide education about health-related matters, particularly those that affect teenagers, eg, condoms and sexual health.
- Professional help – encourage teenagers to seek this where necessary and appropriate, eg, directing a teenager to a GP or clinical psychologist, or a dietitian if they buy diet pills or diet-related products. Another example is checking whether a teenager is linked with a clinical psychologist when filling an anti-depressant script. Additionally, pharmacy staff could encourage a teenager to return to their GP if they purchase a product that may warrant further investigation from a GP.
- Oversee decisions teenagers make about products and medications that relate to their health. This may include dissuading them from buying particular products not suited to use by teenagers, or

where there is potential for them to be misused, eg, laxatives or large quantities of paracetamol.

- Role – provide information to teenagers about the role of pharmacy staff, and when and how you can assist them with health and wellbeing issues. Many people visit pharmacies to purchase products without knowing that pharmacy staff can assist in other ways (eg, support, education, etc). This could also be in the form of a handout or poster at a pharmacy that includes information about how its staff can help.
  - Time – take time to talk to teenagers about their issues. Pharmacists are in a great position to demonstrate to teenagers that they are open and willing to discuss any issues or answer any questions the teenager has about their health or wellbeing. Conveying a non-judgmental and approachable stance is so helpful in facilitating in teenagers a feeling of being heard, understood and encouraged to reach out when they need to.
- “We want to make sure that when teenagers [or others] come to buy a product, the level of interaction with the pharmacy staff is proportionate to the product they are buying,” Ms Allen said.

“Teenagers will be deterred from

going to a particular pharmacy if they are questioned relentlessly about why they are buying certain products. Likewise, if a teenager buys a product and is not questioned at all, they may miss an opportunity to learn more about that product, including its advantages and disadvantages.

“Depending on the type of product teenagers are buying, there might be different levels of intervention that pharmacists take.

“There may be instances where pharmacy staff may opt not to sell the product/s to the teenager, in which case a clear rationale/explanation should be given about how this decision is in the best interests of the teenager, as well as the circumstances [if any] under which the teenager would be sold the product/s. This may be relevant where pharmacy staff become aware of someone’s drug-use history and the teenager continually attempts to buy over-the-counter products that are commonly abused, for example, codeine.

“Pharmacists would need to provide their staff with a list of products that would fit under each tier, for example so staff are aware of whether they should sell a product and include education, or not sell a product at all.” <sup>RP</sup>

## Q&A with Life & Mind Psychology Clinical Psychologist Stephanie Allen

**Can pharmacists partner with associations, local health professionals and even suppliers to provide better services to teenagers?**

As a pharmacist it is great to be aware of the particular issues the teenagers in your area are more likely to be faced with (for example, rural areas versus urban areas).

Perhaps utilise partnerships with GPs to become more aware of issues teenagers are presenting with. For example, teenagers in rural areas may be experiencing different issues compared with teenagers in urban areas.

Visit schools to educate teenagers about the role of pharmacy staff.

Choose connections with suppliers and organisations that will facilitate teenagers making wise choices about their health and wellbeing, eg, sunscreen brands, condom brands.

**What categories can pharmacists champion by providing proper training to pharmacy staff?**

Areas that involve teenagers might include dieting and body image, mental health, sleep, addiction and exercise.



**How can pharmacists best position the pharmacy as a go-to destination for teenagers?**

Engaging, written information may be very useful for promotion, for example, features in school newsletters, advertisements in local newspapers or health-related marketing material, flyers in GP practices, etc.

This material might include statements such as, “Did you know your pharmacy can assist you with ..?”

Radio or TV advertising can be used if the budget is big enough. Another very important medium would be social media – there are endless possibilities to explore here, eg, blog posts, Twitter feeds, etc, that are popular with teenagers.

Also, employing more young adults in pharmacies is one way to get adolescents on-side. Having older staff members question them or chastise them will make the adolescents feel uncomfortable and defensive. Having people around their age who can act as a model for proper conduct will encourage adolescents to act in a similar way.

Once a week, pharmacies could hold mini-seminars, with a new topic selected each week and information given out in the form of a talk, or pamphlets. More up-to-date methods could include podcasts, or a Facebook page posting health-related facts. <sup>RP</sup>

## EXPAND YOUR RANGE

### PUBERTY HEALTH

#### Fab Iron

Teenagers are commonly prone to iron deficiency. This is due to high iron requirements for growth, menstruation or a low iron diet (eg, vegetarians).

Menstruating girls are more likely to have iron depletion compared with non-menstruating girls. Study results show that in a sample of 274 menstruating girls, 33.5 per cent have iron depletion compared with 15.9 per cent iron depletion in a sample of 948 non-menstruating girls.

Fab Iron has been specially developed to assist when dietary iron and vitamin intake are inadequate. A low-dose, low-constipation iron supplement with high absorption, Fab Iron contains an organic form of iron, which is easy to absorb and gentle on the stomach.

Fab Iron contains iron and energy-boosting B-group vitamins to help restore energy and overall health to keep up with teenagers' busy lifestyles. It also helps cell growth for growing bodies and improves alertness and concentration for teenage girls and boys.

**RRP:** Fab Iron 30 tabs, \$12.95, 60 tabs, \$18.95, 60 caps, \$18.95. Liquid Iron 250ml bottle, \$18.95, 20 x 10ml sachets, \$18.95.

**Stockist inquiries:** 1800 788 870.

**Visit:** [www.fabiron.com.au](http://www.fabiron.com.au).



#### Papulex

Papulex is an innovative range of anti-acne products specially formulated to help calm, control and clear acne-prone skin. Papulex contains three key ingredients: nicotinamide to help calm red and irritated skin, zinc PCA to help control oily skin and maintain the skin in good condition, and an antibacterial adhesive substance that helps block the adherence of bacteria to the skin.

Papulex is available in three presentations: Papulex Moussant Soap Free Cleansing Gel, Papulex Oil-Free Cream for application to acne-affected areas morning and night, and Papulex Isocorrexion Hydrating Cream for very dry skin.

**RRP:** Papulex Moussant Soap Free Cleansing Gel 150ml, \$28.25; Papulex Oil-Free Cream 40ml, \$28.25; Papulex Isocorrexion Hydrating Cream 50ml, \$34.

**Stockist inquiries:** See your local wholesaler.

**Visit:** [www.papulex.com.au](http://www.papulex.com.au).



#### Aspect Teen Facial Lotion

Aspect is an Australian made and owned condition-specific cosmeceutical range. Aspect contains chirally corrected active ingredients in the highest concentrations and is sourced from the world's most advanced pharmaceutical and bio-technological companies.

Aspect Teen Facial Lotion is loaded with bacteria-targeting ingredients and soothing botanicals. The Facial Lotion is a light moisturiser, perfect for providing teenage skin with protection, hydration and bacterial control. The formulation moisturises while addressing problem-skin concerns. The lotion is suitable for all skin types, including problem and normal skin. Key ingredients include Canadian willowherb, macadamia and jojoba oil, lemon tea tree oil and Beracare Triple A Anti-acne Active System.

**RRP:** Aspect Teen Facial Lotion 50ml, \$19.80.

**Stockist inquiries:** 1800 648 851.

**Visit:** [www.advancedskintechology.com.au](http://www.advancedskintechology.com.au).



#### Nurofen Zavance

Nurofen Zavance is specifically designed to ease pain fast when you can't wait around for discomfort to subside. Absorbed twice as fast as standard Nurofen, Nurofen Zavance provides effective pain relief, rapidly reaching the source of your discomfort so you don't have to miss a moment of your day.

Bronwyn Flanagan, Pharmacy Services Manager from Priceline Pharmacy, said Nurofen Zavance was an anti-inflammatory, appropriate for many types of different pain states that teenagers may experience during puberty, including dental pain from braces, headaches from study and period pain.

In easy-to-swallow tablets, Nurofen Zavance provides fast pain relief when you need it most and should be taken with water as directed.

**RRP:** Nurofen Zavance 12s (tablets and caplet variants), \$3.99, 24s (tablets and caplets), \$6.39, 48s (tablets), \$11.64, 72s (tablets), \$16.79, 10s (liquid caps), \$4.29, 20s (liquid caps), \$6.69.

**Stockist inquiries:** 1800 022 046.

**Visit:** [www.nurofen.com.au](http://www.nurofen.com.au).



#### Oriental Botanicals Women's Qi

Balance women's health and regulate the menstrual cycle naturally with Oriental Botanicals Women's Qi, which relieves premenstrual symptoms (breast tenderness, fluid retention, irritability, mood swings, headaches, sweet cravings). It also eases functional dysmenorrhoea (period pain and cramps) and alleviates dysfunctional bleeding (heavy, prolonged or irregular menstruation).

Women's Qi provides traditional herbal actions including antispasmodic, muscle relaxant, analgesic, anti-inflammatory (pelvic) and blood tonic.

**RRP:** Women's Qi 30 tabs, \$26.95, 60 tabs, \$39.95.

**Stockist inquiries:** 1800 550 103.

**Visit:** [www.orientalbotanicals.com.au](http://www.orientalbotanicals.com.au).



#### Blackmores Teen Multi for Girls

Ensuring teenage girls have a balanced diet can be challenging, so it's hard to know if they're getting all they need during these critical years through puberty and beyond when their bodies and minds are still developing.

Blackmores Teen Multi for Girls contains a blend of five essential brain nutrients, as well as providing general vitamins and minerals to help girls reach their full potential and have healthy bodies.

Blackmores Teen Multi for Girls is a multivitamin and mineral supplement, including five nutrients essential for healthy brain development: iodine, omega-3 fatty acids, iron, zinc and vitamin B12.

**RRP:** Blackmores Teen Multi for Girls 60 caps, \$27.49.

**Stockist inquiries:** 02 9910 5383.

**Visit:** [www.blackmores.com.au](http://www.blackmores.com.au).

