



Early Steps Project Newsletter

July 2015

Early Steps is Underway!

We are in full swing, and have begun seeing families for the Age 14 home visit, which occurs when your child is between 13.5 and 14.5. It is so exciting to see the children in our study develop into teenagers on the cusp of young adulthood. It's hard to believe that we started the project when they were just toddlers! We want to continue to learn more about youth in their teenage years, including their behaviors both at home and at school, how your family gets along, and the role that friends play during this time. And as always, **thank you for your ongoing dedication to the Early Steps Project!**

Saliva Samples and Your Genes: A New Direction for the Early Steps Project

As many of you know, we have been collecting saliva samples for the first time in Early Steps. We now know that it's important to measure both youth's behavior and biology to best understand health and development. As part of Early Steps, we will study particular genes that are different from person to person and are sometimes related to behavior, giving us a much better understanding of how youth develop.



Questions we plan to answer with the saliva samples of DNA:

1. Does the same type of environment have different effects on different adolescents?
2. Parents always tell us that their children—even though they are growing up in the same home—are very different from one another.
3. Are some adolescents more sensitive to their home and school environments than others?
4. How much do adolescents themselves create their own environments? As youth grow up, they take a more active role in selecting their friends and activities.

We cannot answer any of these questions for a single child, but when we combine the data from everyone participating in Early Steps, we can begin to see patterns that provide answers.

The Importance of a Healthy Lifestyle During Early Adolescence

Early adolescence is a time of great change. Youth experience many physical changes as they mature, they face more challenging social situations with their friends, and school becomes more demanding. These challenges make early adolescence a critical time to develop healthy habits. Physical activity and sleep are two key components of a healthy lifestyle that can help your family maintain a healthy weight. Trouble sleeping and sedentary behavior, or a lack of physical activity, have been linked to obesity. In turn, obesity has been

linked to many health problems including diabetes, heart disease, and mental health problems like depression and anxiety

Sleep

During teenage years, children's brains undergo a change in their sleep cycle, or "circadian rhythm," that makes it harder for them to fall asleep at night and harder for them to wake up early. Teens who are lacking sleep can have trouble concentrating in school and can develop mental health problems like depression. It's important to help teenagers develop healthy sleep habits. Below are some tips to help your family get a better night's sleep.



- ✓ Wake up and go to bed at the same time every day
- ✓ Use the bed and bedroom only for sleeping – no TV or texting!
- ✓ Lights out! – Turning down the lights and putting away anything with a bright screen (TV, Cell phone) will help let your body know it's time for sleep
- ✓ Practice "savoring" – At bedtime, lay in bed and think about times in the past when you felt really good or happy.
- ✓ Get out of bed and go to another room if you are not able to fall asleep within 15 to 20 minutes and return to bed when sleepy

Keep us updated!

If you contact us to give us an updated address or phone number, we will send you \$10 as a thank you.

Physical Activity

Physical activity levels decrease dramatically during adolescence, and this sedentary behavior has been related to negative moods in teenagers. It can also contribute to sleep problems, making them even worse.

Here are some tips to fit exercise into your everyday routine.

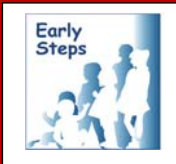
- Take the stairs!
- Walk around when talking on the phone
- Get up and move around during TV commercials
- Park farther away in parking lots
- Take a walk to a local park or community center

- Shovel snow from walkways in the winter or rake leaves in the fall

Recent Early Steps Findings: Preventing Weight Gain and Obesity

Providing children with nutritious food is key in helping to prevent obesity and to promote healthy child outcomes. Early Steps researchers examined whether positive parent management strategies (e.g., providing structure and guidance for their children) were related to using healthy and nutritious foods to prepare meals for their children.

Researchers found that using more positive parenting skills when children were 2 years old predicted more nutritious meal preparation one year later when the children were age 3. The same pattern was found from ages 3 to 5. These findings suggest that positive parenting behaviors provide a foundation for providing young children with high-quality, nutritious meals.



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Outdoor Summer Activities in Virginia to Keep Your Family Moving – And They Are Free!

Water Fun

Twin Hickory Park and Recreation Center, Glen Allen, VA. Visit <http://henrico.us/rec/places/twin-hickory/> or call (804) 290305



Charlottesville Spray Grounds
Forest Hills Park, Greenleaf Park, and Belmont Park, visit <http://www.charlottesville.org/index.aspx?page=2779> or call (434) 970-3260

Music

Summer Concerts at Richmond Malls. Visit http://www.richmond.com/entertainment/music/article_8988c59e-bcb6-11e2-a453-0019bb30f31a.html

Fridays After Five, Charlottesville. Visit <http://www.visitcharlottesville.org/includes/events/index.cfm?eventid=2>

Fridays on the Square Music Festival, Harrisonburg. Visit <http://www.fridaysonthesquare.com/>

Outdoor Activities

A Dream Come True Playground, Harrisonburg. Visit <http://www.harrisonburgva.gov/dream-come-true-playground>

Humpback Rock Hike, Blue Ridge Parkway. Visit <http://www.blueridgeparkway.org/v.php?pg=103> or call (540) 943-4716



EARLY STEPS SITE INFORMATION

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