

Health guide for young adults



Table of contents

2 Health guide for young adults

3 Staying healthy as a young adult

9 Personal safety as a young adult

13 Sexual health as a young adult

16 Mental health as a young adult

20 Alcohol and drug use as a young adult

23 Final thoughts about living healthy as a young adult

Health guide for young adults

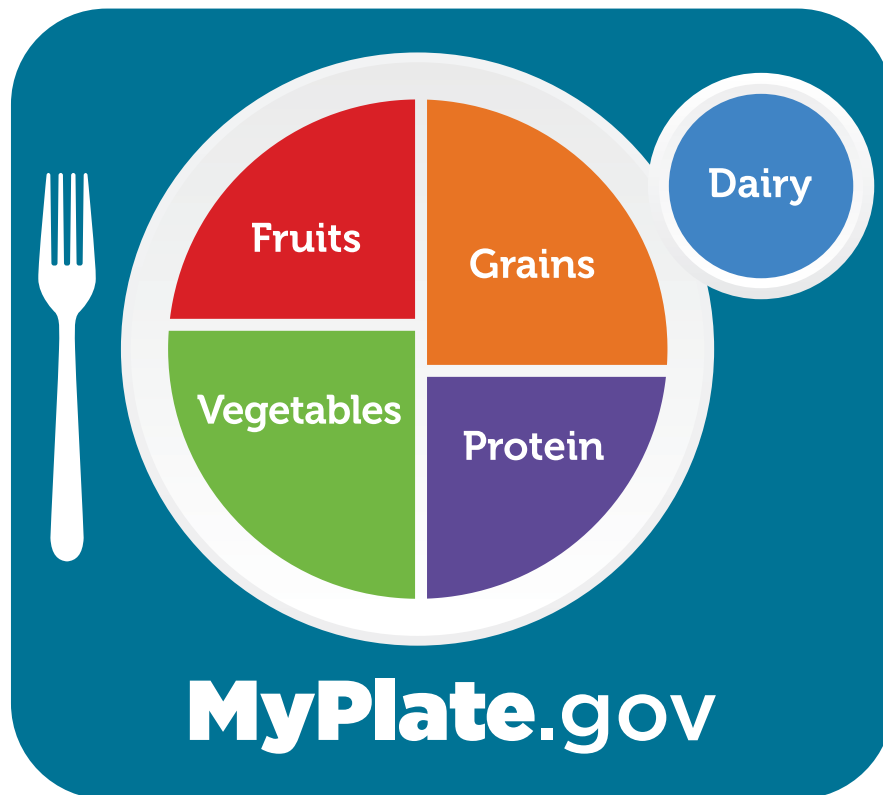
As a young adult, you depend less on your parents. You make more decisions about your life. They include decisions about your health and well-being.

This health guide can help you make good decisions about health and well-being. If you have questions at any time talk to a member of your healthcare team.



Staying healthy as a young adult

Healthy eating means you pay attention to what, when and how much food you eat. To get the nutrients you need, eat a variety of foods each day. Eat only small amounts of fats and oils. Include a variety of fruits and vegetables. The most colorful foods are usually the most nutritious. Eat three meals and two snacks each day.



Grains: Eat 6 oz. every day	Vegetables: Eat 2 1/2 cups every day	Fruits: Eat 2 cups every day	Dairy: Get 3 cups every day	Protein: Eat 5 1/2 oz. every day
--	---	---	--	---

To find the amounts that are right for you, go to the interactive website, [MyPlate.gov](https://www.MyPlate.gov).

Healthy body weight

Healthy body weight is different for each person. It depends on age and body development. It depends on bone structure, metabolism and heredity. Being overweight is not healthy. Being underweight also is not healthy. If you need to make weight changes, your healthcare team can guide you.

Quick and easy foods on a budget

Eating a healthy diet may challenge those on a budget. Check for special promotions and discounts at your local store. Talk with friends and family about healthy food options. Discuss your diet with your healthcare professional. You can eat healthy foods while on a budget. But it does take time and effort.

Eat a variety of food every day:

- **Fruits:** Apples, oranges, blueberries and pears. Cherries, grapes and bananas.
- **Vegetables:** Green beans, carrots and peas. Celery, tomatoes and squash.
- **Grains:** Whole wheat, buckwheat and barley corn. Oats and rice.
- **Proteins:** Chicken and turkey, low-fat cheeses and eggs.
- **Dairy:** Skim milk and yogurt.

Preventive healthcare

Typically, you should see a healthcare professional once a year. What happens during a yearly exam is different for each person. It depends on a person's health and concerns. Your healthcare professional may recommend exams and tests based on suggested medical guidelines. But you are in charge of your body and medical care.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Write questions down before you talk with your healthcare professional. Your health professional often asks you several questions. Some may embarrass you. But answer them honestly. Your conversation with your health professional should be private. It is not shared with others without your permission.

It's OK to switch to a different healthcare professional if you are not happy with your care. It is important to find the right match. You and your healthcare professional can create a positive partnership. Together you guide your medical care as you make important health decisions for years to come.

Confidential medical information

Beginning at age 18, you are the owner of your medical care. You have the right to request medical care, tests and treatment. And you should expect your medical information to be kept private. It does not matter who pays for your care.

Your healthcare team members now contact you about your medical care. If you do want your care team to talk with your parents, you can sign a form that gives your care team permission to do so.

If you sign this form but decide later you do not want your parents to know about your healthcare, you may cancel it at any time. Your care team honors your wishes and does not release information to your parents.

A brief description of a medical service sometimes appears on a billing statement. This is there for insurance purposes. If you are covered by a parent's health insurance, your parent may see the description. This may provide information you do not want your parent to know.

Talk with your healthcare professional about your concerns. It is possible that your parents may find out something you do not want them to know. Also, your college may contact your parents if you violate drug or alcohol laws and are under 21. Talk with your parents about what you want to share and what you want to stay private.

No one should look at your medical information without your consent. This includes medical information stored within your patient portal. You can use the patient portal to communicate with your care team.

The patient portal stores your medical record. The portal includes appointments, test results and notes about you that your healthcare team writes. To better understand how the portal works and how your medical information is shared, ask your healthcare team.

College student health center

If you are a college student living at college, you may sometimes get sick and not see your regular healthcare professional. Or it may be possible to schedule a virtual health visit with your regular healthcare team if you are sick. If that isn't possible, most colleges offer a student health center. The staff at the center provide health education and give referrals to off-campus healthcare professionals. A college health center often provides mental health counseling services. It also provides health promotion and prevention services.

If you have a chronic medical condition, ask your healthcare professional to send the student health center a medical summary for you. This summary describes interventions you may need and activity restrictions. It also includes information about medicines you take.

If you have a medical condition that involves a disability, ask about accommodations you may need.

Health insurance

Having health insurance is an important part of taking care of yourself. Many young adults can keep health insurance under a parent's policy until they are age 26. If you are a college student living where your college is located, find out how your insurance works in that area.

Understand how your insurance works, what it covers and where you can use it. Carry an insurance card with you. Take this with you whenever you have medical care or you pick up medicines your healthcare professional prescribes.

If you do not have health insurance or need more health insurance, consider enrolling in a plan provided by your college or employer.

Vaccines

Many important vaccines protect you from illnesses. Your healthcare professional reviews your vaccine history during your yearly visits and can give you the vaccines you need.

If you plan to travel outside the country, ask your healthcare professional what vaccines are suggested for the area you travel to. Reach out to your health professional before your trip. Give plenty of time to get the vaccines you need before you go.



Common vaccines recommended for young adults include:

Meningococcal disease. A common form of this disease is meningitis. It is an infection of the membranes and fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord. You may have received a vaccine for this when you were a child or a teenager. But you may need a booster dose. Or you may need a first dose.

Influenza. This also is called the flu. You are recommended to get a flu vaccine once a year, in the fall. Flu is an infection that attacks the respiratory system. This includes your nose, throat and lungs.

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). You are recommended to get this vaccine once a year. Some people get it the same time they get the flu vaccine. COVID-19 is an illness that attacks the respiratory system.

Human papillomavirus (HPV). It is the most common sexually transmitted infection. More than half of the sexually active men and women in the United States are infected with HPV. It can cause genital warts and cervical cancer. Children can get it as young as age 9. If you did not get the vaccine as a child, you still can get it as a young adult. People can get the vaccine until age 45.

Physical activity

As a young adult, you may find it more of a challenge to do physical activity than it was when you were in high school. Often, this is because there is an increase in demand for your time. College studies, work schedules, and social and professional networking activities may make it difficult to take part in exercise.



So, what can you do? Exercise with a friend. Many people find this is more fun than exercising alone. The most important thing is to find a physical activity you enjoy. You are more likely to continue to do it if you enjoy it. It may be more enjoyable if you do different physical activities. It also may be helpful to find seasonal activities. That can help you stay physically active throughout the year.

Getting enough sleep

Young adults often do not get enough sleep. Reasons for this include a demanding schedule. They may include poor time-management skills. And they may include an irregular sleep schedule.

You may live in an environment that makes it difficult to stay on a good sleep schedule and sleep well. For example, you may live in a residence hall or apartment. Trying to get by on too little sleep may cause serious problems. When you do not get good sleep:

- Your immune system does not work as well. You may get sick more often.
- You are more likely to have stress, anxiety or depression.
- Your concentration and memory are affected.
- Your risk of drug and alcohol use increases.

You need about 8 to 9 hours of sleep a night. Try to keep a regular sleep schedule. Go to bed at the same time each night. Wake up at the same time each day.

Finding reliable online health information

The internet can be a helpful tool to find health information. But not all health information you find on the internet is reliable. Anyone with a computer can set up a website. That is why it is important to evaluate online health information.

Where does the online information come from?

The website should clearly show which organization, company or person handles the information.

A website's address gives you some of this information. It is called a URL.

- .gov — U.S. federal government.
- .edu — Public or private school.
- .org — Nonprofit organization.
- .com — For-profit business.

If you have questions about health information on the internet, ask your healthcare professional. Website information should not be used to diagnose or treat any medical or mental health condition.

Personal safety as a young adult

Consent

How do you know when it's the right time for you to have sex? Every person is different. Be honest about what you do and do not want to do with your partner. Listen to what your partner does and does not want to do. Talk about this when you are not in a passionate moment. You can communicate better then.

Rape

You get to say, "No!" or "Stop!" at any time. Your partner should respect that. If not, do whatever you have to do to get out of that situation. Yell "NO!" Scream, push away, kick, run. This is your body. You did not lead your partner on. You changed your mind. You get to change your mind. Your partner should respect that.

It may be considered a sexual assault or rape if someone:

- Does not stop when you say to stop.
- Uses force to get you to do something.
- Does something to you when you cannot give permission or consent. Maybe you have been drinking alcohol or have drugs in your body. These affect your ability to make decisions. To keep sexual assault or rape from happening:
 - Take a friend to a bar, dance spot or concert. Do not leave by yourself.
 - Do not take drinks from people you do not know.
 - Watch your drinks being prepared.

These issues apply to everyone. If you want to talk to someone about this, contact your healthcare professional. Or talk to another trusted adult.

For help:

- Call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800-656-HOPE (800-656-4673).
- Visit RAINN (Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network) website: <https://rainn.org>

Dating violence

Have you experienced abuse or violence with your romantic partner? If you are not sure, get advice from a trusted adult. Are your friends and family OK with this person and how you are treated? Has anyone made comments about how you are treated? Maybe you thought your family or friends were critical. Is there a pattern of behavior that is not healthy? Listen to your gut.

Dating violence includes:

- Physical violence.
- Verbal abuse.
- Threatening behavior.
- Sexual abuse.
- Emotional abuse.

A victim of dating violence may:

- Feel intimidated or scared of a romantic partner.
- Feel isolated and alone.
- Have low self-esteem because of a partner's threats or control.

What can you do if you experience dating violence?

- Stay calm and get to a place where you feel safe.
- Tell a trusted friend or family member. The person loves you and wants to help.
- Get any other help you may need, such as from the police.
- If you receive any pictures, text threats or voicemails, or otherwise odd messages, do not remove them. They may help prove why you did not feel safe.
- Stay away from the person you do not feel safe around.

For help:

- Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (800-799-7233).

Sex trafficking

Sex trafficking happens when a trafficker takes advantage of someone. This person uses force, fraud or threats to make others do sexual acts. The trafficker is paid money for these acts. Those involved suffer physical, psychological and emotional abuse. Help is available for them. For help:

- Call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 888-373-7888.
- Text 233733.
- Take part in an online chat at humantraffickinghotline.org.

Did you know?

One American is sexually assaulted about every minute. Women are most likely to be victims. Young adults are at the highest risk of rape or sexual assault. Sexual violence can cause long-term health effects. These include post-traumatic stress disorder and drug use. It also can cause relationship problems.

Driving

Driving may seem easy, but it is a complicated task. It can be dangerous for anyone. Traffic crashes are one of the leading causes of death for young adults.

To lower your risk of an accident while driving:

- Do not eat, drink, text or talk on a cellphone.
- Do not let other people or loud music distract you.
- Never drink alcohol and drive.
- Buckle up! Use your seat belt.
- Follow all traffic laws and watch for speed limit changes.
- Watch the weather and road conditions.
- Slow down at night. If you feel sleepy, pull over safely and stop driving.



Did you know?

Car crashes are the leading cause of death among young adults across the world. Most are caused by mistakes that can be prevented. These include getting behind the wheel when tired or under the influence of alcohol or drugs. They include not wearing a seat belt. In the United States, being distracted is the number one cause of car accidents.

Safe social media and cellphone use

Social networking and face-to-face chatting are quick, easy ways to stay connected. Sending texts, email and direct messaging also keep you connected. But information and images can get sent quickly. And once they are out there, you cannot get them back. You cannot control how other people use them.

Before you put anything online or send it in a text message, think:

- Who could see this?
- How will it affect a person's opinion of me?
- Will I regret posting this?
- What would an employer, friend or family member think?
- Is what I am doing legal?



Ways to stay safe online:

- Never post anything online that you do not want publicly known.
- Do not share your Social Security number or bank account numbers.
- Choose a public setting to meet someone you have met online. Tell others before you go.
- Do not respond to harassing or rude online communication.
- Know your college and work guidelines for online use.
- Be cautious about giving personal information for online purchases.
- Think about what you post. It may affect relationships and career opportunities.
- Think about the consequences of taking, sending or forwarding a sexual picture.
- Respect others. If it is not OK to say something in person it is not OK to post.
- Use privacy settings to limit others' access to your online profile.
- Use a password to protect your phone. Do not share it. Change passwords often.
- Be selective about the people you allow on your social media sites.
- Do not trust people you do not know in person. Do not tell them where you live.

Sexual health as a young adult

Being sexually active brings risks. They include facing an unplanned pregnancy and emotional consequences. They include getting a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

If you have decided to be sexually active:

- Talk with your partner about your relationship, sex and birth control. Discuss how to handle an unexpected pregnancy.
- Use a condom to protect yourself from STIs.
- Use a reliable form of birth control.
- The decision to have sex is yours to make. Just because you have had sex in the past does not mean you have to continue. It is OK to say no at any time.

Birth control options

It is best to use two types of birth control. For people assigned female at birth, hormonal birth control keeps the body from releasing eggs. Condoms keep sperm from reaching eggs. Condoms also are the only form of birth control that lessens the chance of an STI.

You need a prescription from your healthcare professional to have hormonal birth control. Examples include:

- Pills.
- A patch.
- A vaginal ring.
- An implant.
- An injection.
- An intrauterine device with hormones. This is called an IUD.



Condoms can be bought at the store. Use a new condom every time you have sex. Use condoms made from latex or polyurethane. They give the best protection.

A healthcare professional can suggest reliable forms of birth control. Whatever you choose for birth control, know that no birth control is 100% reliable.

Sexually transmitted infections

Some sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can be treated. Some can stay with you for a long time, even years. Some cause long-term health conditions. These include infertility, cancer or AIDS. Some STIs can kill you. STIs can happen in same-sex and opposite-sex couples. The more people you have sexual contact with, the higher your risk of an STI.

Types of STIs include:

- Chlamydia.
- Gonorrhea.
- Syphilis.
- Genital herpes.
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

Symptoms of STIs

You may have no symptoms and still have an STI. That is why yearly screenings set up by your healthcare team can help catch something you do not know you have.

Symptoms of an STI may include:

- Pain when you urinate.
- Discharge from the penis.
- Irregular vaginal discharge or bleeding.
- Fever.
- Pain in your abdomen.

If you think you have an STI, talk with your healthcare professional.

Did you know?

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are a common public health problem across the world. In the United States, young adults make up half of the newly reported cases of STIs. The most common STI among young adults is chlamydia.

Mental health as a young adult

Your mental health is important to your overall well-being. Depression, anxiety and eating disorders are examples of mental health conditions. Knowing about them and knowing how to manage or treat them is powerful knowledge. Mental health conditions are real. They do not go away on their own.

You do not have to face mental health conditions alone. If things seem too big to manage, reach out for help. Call your care team. Reach out to a friend. If things don't seem to be working, you have options. You are worth the effort. Life can be easier. You can get back energy and experience joy again.

Mental health conditions are:

- Common. People of all walks of life have mental health conditions.
- Manageable. Taking an active part in managing gets the best results.
- Treatable. It takes time to decide the best treatment for you. It takes time for that treatment to work. Sometimes the treatment plan can be complex. For example, depression can be difficult to treat.
- Best treated when you stay connected to, and work with, your healthcare team.

Mental health conditions are not:

- Simply a failure of your ability to cope with bad things.
- A disease you overcome with willpower.
- On a timeline. You may experience one episode of depression or anxiety. Or have a short-term experience with an eating disorder. You may need to manage your condition for the rest of your life. One episode does put you at risk of another.

Depression

The pressures of college life, work, relationships or being on your own may sometimes cause you to feel down or unhappy. Everyone experiences this once in a while. But it usually improves in a day or two.

If you continue to feel irritable or unhappy most days, and those feelings last for two weeks or more, you may have depression. That is a medical condition. It is called clinical depression. It is common and serious.

How do I know whether I have depression and need help?

If any of the following keeps you from enjoying life, talk to your healthcare professional.

- Little interest or pleasure in doing things.
- Feeling down, depressed or hopeless.
- Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or sleeping too much.
- Feeling tired or having little energy.
- Poor appetite or overeating.
- Feeling bad about yourself, or feeling you are a failure.
- Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading or watching television.
- Moving or speaking so slowly that other people notice. Or being so restless that you are moving around more than usual.
- Thoughts that you would be better off dead. Or thinking of hurting yourself in some way.

Suicide

If you do not want to live anymore or you have thoughts of killing yourself, ask for help. Talk to someone you trust. You may need the help of a healthcare professional. If you know someone who is thinking about suicide, try to get help for that person.

What are the signs someone is thinking about suicide?

Someone who is thinking about suicide may:

- Talk, read or write about suicide or death.
- Feel worthless or helpless.
- Show symptoms of serious depression.
- Take part in self-destructive behavior such as self-cutting.
- Use more alcohol and other drugs.
- Take risks, such as driving recklessly or getting into physical fights.
- Buy a gun, stock up on sleeping pills or get other items that could be used to commit suicide.
- Give away prized possessions.
- Make statements such as “getting even” with friends, family, boyfriends or girlfriends.

Get help!

If you think about killing yourself, ask for help right away. If you know someone who is thinking about suicide, get help right away.

- Tell a friend or family member.
- Call 911.
- Call 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline or 1-800-273-8255.
- Chat at 988lifeline.org.
- Go to a hospital emergency room or call your healthcare professional.



Anxiety

Everyone gets a little worried sometimes. That's OK. Feeling nervous, scared or worried is called anxiety. Anxiety sometimes can help you do your best at college, at work or in other activities.

But worrying too much for too long is not good. Feeling anxious should not keep you from doing what you want or need to do. If you think anxiety gets in the way of your daily life, tell someone you trust. This may be a family member, a friend or a member of your healthcare team.

How do you know whether your anxiety is a problem?

Anxiety may be a problem if you:

- Become anxious even when you are safe.
- Worry about things that are not likely to happen.
- Are more afraid of something than most people you know.
- Feel nervous most of the time.
- Do something over and over to keep something bad from happening.
- Avoid doing things or going places.

Treatments can help with anxiety. Talk with your healthcare team about how you feel. Your care team can help you with a plan to manage your anxiety.

Did you know?

Young adults are more likely than older adults to experience anxiety or depression symptoms. And suicide is a leading cause of death for young adults in the United States and around the world.

Eating disorders

Eating disorders happen when people become too focused on body shape, weight and food. As a result, they develop life-threatening behaviors.

People with eating disorders may deny they have a problem. Or they may not even see they have a problem. They may feel embarrassed or ashamed. They may try to hide the disorder.

What are signs and symptoms of eating disorders?

A person who has an eating disorder may have:

- A lot of weight loss or very low body weight.
- Intense fear of gaining weight or getting fat, even when very underweight.
- Unrealistic body belief.
- No menstrual periods.
- An extreme focus on weight or body shape.

A person who has an eating disorder also may have:

- Excessive dieting.
- Too much or nearly constant exercising.
- Repeated episodes of binge eating and not being able to stop eating.
- Repeated episodes of vomiting, also called purging.

Treatment of eating disorders helps restore physical and psychological health. Eating disorders can lead to dehydration, dizziness and fainting. They also can lead to muscle weakness and fatigue. They can make it difficult to concentrate.

Eating disorders can cause serious long-term health problems. Examples include binge eating and bulimia nervosa and anorexia nervosa. If you feel you have an eating disorder, reach out to someone you trust. Connect with your healthcare team.

Did you know?

Young adults with eating disorders have a higher risk of other mental health conditions. These include depression and anxiety. And they include substance use disorders.

Alcohol and drug use as a young adult

Alcohol

Most college students are below the legal drinking age of 21. Still, alcohol is a big feature of social life on most campuses. A majority of college students drink. Many are binge drinkers.

Binge drinking for men is defined as five or more drinks within two hours. For women, binge drinking is defined as four or more drinks within two hours.

You drink too much alcohol when you drink to the point of blacking out or passing out, not remembering, and vomiting. You drink too much if people tell you that you drink too much.



If you believe you need to drink less, if friends comment on how much you drink, or if you ever feel guilty about something you have done while drinking, talk with a healthcare professional.

Did you know?



Tobacco and vaping

Tobacco causes many health problems. They include heart disease, stroke and chronic lung disease. Tobacco increases your chance of lung cancer. It can kill you. Also, tobacco is expensive. It makes your clothing, hair and breath smell bad. It stains your teeth.

Many people believe vaping or using electronic cigarettes is a safe choice instead of using products with tobacco. This is not true. Just like tobacco, vaping devices have a drug called nicotine. Nicotine affects the brain. It can disrupt and change important connections within the brain. These connections help you focus, learn and remember. Nicotine also can make it easier to become addicted to other harmful substances.

Did you know?

Smoking and secondhand smoke exposure cause thousands of deaths in the United States. Millions of Americans live with a smoking-related disease. They can be prevented by not smoking.



Marijuana

Marijuana is now legal in many states. It is called THC. It is available in different forms. But making it legal does not mean it isn't harmful. It can harm the developing brain, increase the risk of mental health issues and affect the ability to drive safely.

Prescription medicines and illegal drugs

Prescription medicines or illegal drugs can have an impact on your body. They include benzodiazepines, commonly called benzos. Benzos affect your central nervous system. They also include opioids. Opioids affect how your brain receives messages about pain.

Prescription medicine can be dangerous if you do not take it as told by your healthcare professional. Taking someone else's prescription medicine is as risky as taking illegal drugs. Taking too much of your prescription medicine also can be just as risky. Doing this can cause serious health problems and can sometimes lead to death. Get help if you think you may have a problem with substance use.

Did you know?

Young adults have the highest rates of prescription medicine misuse in the United States.

Final thoughts about living healthy as a young adult

Once you become a young adult, you handle your own healthcare decisions. Protecting your health is a lifelong process. Take personal responsibility for important healthcare and lifestyle decisions. Ensure your well-being now and into the future.

Reliable healthcare resources

Local nurse health advice help line: _____

Healthcare professional: _____

Student health center: _____

After-hours care: _____

Local emergency room: _____

Other: _____

For more information, go to Mayo Clinic's website at www.mayoclinic.org.

Other health and wellness resources include:

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:
 - Call or text 988
 - Call 1-800-273-8255
 - Lifeline Chat 988lifeline.org
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-SAFE (800-799-7233)
- North American Quitline Consortium: 800-Quit Now (800-784-8669)
- Poison Help:
 - Call 800-222-1222
 - www.poisonhelp.org/help
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov
- MyHealthFinder: <https://odphp.health.gov/myhealthfinder>
- MedlinePlus: www.medlineplus.gov
- MyPlate: www.myplate.gov

Mayo Clinic does not sponsor, endorse or guarantee the accuracy of these resources and websites. Websites should not be used to diagnose or treat health problems.



Invest in your health!

Barbara Woodward Lips

PATIENT EDUCATION CENTER

Mrs. Lips, a resident of San Antonio, Texas, was a loyal patient of Mayo Clinic for more than 40 years. She was a self-made business leader who significantly expanded her family's activities in oil, gas and ranching, even as she assembled a museum-quality collection of antiques and fine art. She was best known by Mayo staff for her patient advocacy and support. Upon her death in 1995, Mrs. Lips paid the ultimate compliment by leaving her entire estate to Mayo Clinic.

Mrs. Lips had a profound appreciation for the care she received at Mayo Clinic. By naming the Barbara Woodward Lips Patient Education Center, Mayo Clinic honors her generosity, her love of learning, her belief in patient empowerment, and her dedication to high-quality care.

This information is for your education only. It does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. New medical research or practices may change this information. If you have questions about a medical condition, talk with a member of your healthcare team.

Images, if used, are copyright MFMER, Getty Images or Shutterstock, or approved for use.

mayoclinic.org

©2025 Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. All rights reserved. MAYO, MAYO CLINIC and the triple-shield Mayo logo are trademarks and service marks of MFMER.

MC5727rev1025