



# Is it Time for Your Daughter's FIRST VISIT TO THE GYNECOLOGIST?

By Trish Perrault

**If you have a teenage daughter,** you know that this is a time of tremendous change for her as she transitions from a girl to a woman. It can also be a difficult time for parents who may find conversations about a girl's changing body and her sexuality uncomfortable. However, these discussions are critical in making sure your daughter has the accurate information she needs to make empowered choices and decisions that will affect her health for a lifetime. Thankfully, you don't have to go it alone.

"Helping your daughter to establish an open and trusting relationship with a health care provider will give her a 'go-to' person and ensure she gets the information and care she needs," says Lisa Beaudry, CNM, MPH, from Baystate Medical Practices – Mary Lane Ob/Gyn. Below, Beaudry provides some tips to make this happen.

**Q. When should you bring your teenage daughter in for her first gynecologic visit?**

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that most teens visit their gynecologist or certified nurse-midwife (CNM) between the ages of 13 and 15, and should continue to see this provider every year or two for routine gynecologic care and screening.

Of course, if you have any concerns related to gyn issues, you should bring your daughter in for an appointment regardless of her age. Common reasons a

teenage girl should see a gynecologist or CNM include:

- when she becomes sexually active;
- dysmenorrhea– painful or irregular periods;
- pelvic pain or discomfort;
- cysts;
- conceptive counseling;
- itching or vaginal burning, which may indicate an infection.

**Q. What typically happens during the first visit?**

We will perform a regular health exam and history, and talk to her about her development or any questions she has. In addition to a routine exam, we will do a breast exam and teach her how to do a self breast exam. We will also do an abdominal exam to see if any spots are tender or painful. We may do a pelvic exam and Pap smear, but only if it's necessary.

In addition, we provide education about safe sex practices, birth control options, Pap smears and cultures, and premenstrual syndrome (PMS). The first visit provides an opportunity for your daughter to develop a relationship with her provider so that she is comfortable sharing personal information in the future.

**Q. Should I stay in the exam room with my daughter?**

This depends on the teen—but my recommendation is to have the parent in the room during the medical history discussion, but then to step out during the physical exam so the girl can

discuss her specific concerns privately with the provider to ease her embarrassment. Parents should not be offended by a teen's need for privacy, and should encourage their daughter to have a frank and honest discussion with her provider.

**Q. What should I tell my daughter to help her prepare for her first visit?**

Helping teens understand what is going to happen is important so that they are comfortable and understand what to expect. Let her know that the visit will probably last about 15-20 minutes, most of which will be spent discussing her medical history. Your provider may have an educational brochure about what to expect, and there is a lot of information on the internet. Talking about it will help reduce your daughter's stress.

**Q. How should a single father handle this?**

There is really no difference in how you should approach this whether you are the girl's father or mother. This is an important part of your daughter's overall preventive health care. If you find it difficult to talk to your daughter about this topic, you should find a trusted, responsible adult who can talk to her. As a father, you may want to be sensitive to the fact your daughter may be somewhat more uncomfortable having this discussion with you. However, it's important not to let this discomfort stand in the way of your daughter receiving the care she needs.



Lisa Beaudry and her colleagues at BMP - Mary Lane Ob/Gyn, Dr. Shafeeq Ahmed and Dr. Dianne Tappin, provide comprehensive care to women of all ages at two locations: 83 South Street in Ware, and 95 Sargent Street in Belchertown. They are currently welcoming new patients.

For more information or an appointment at either location, call 413-967-2655. For a referral to a gynecologist or certified nurse-midwife on staff at any Baystate Health location, call 1-800-377-4325.