Health Risks and Your Behavior

Guide to Reading

- **Building Vocabulary**
  Two of the terms below are related to keeping you safe. Write down these words. As you read the lesson, write their definitions.
  - risk (p. 23)
  - risk behaviors (p. 24)
  - consequences (p. 24)
  - cumulative risk (p. 25)
  - prevention (p. 26)
  - abstinence (p. 27)

- **Focusing on the Main Ideas**
  In this lesson you will be able to
  - **describe** how risks and risk behaviors can affect your health.
  - **explain** that risk behaviors have consequences.
  - **identify** ways to avoid or reduce risk.

- **Reading Strategy**
  **Finding the Main Idea** Read the main headings in this lesson. For each heading, write one sentence that describes the main idea.

Risk and Risk Behaviors

Some risk is a part of everyday life. A **risk** is the chance that something harmful may happen to your health and wellness. Some risks are easy to identify. For example, if you ride a bike without a helmet, you risk a head injury if you fall. Other risks are more hidden. For example, you might have a habit of snacking on high-fat foods. Eating these foods may lead to unhealthful weight gain and heart disease later in life.

Quick Write

Write about something you believe is a risky behavior. List the possible negative consequences of that behavior.

Inline skating can be fun, but like all physical activities, it carries the risk of injury. What steps have these teens taken to reduce their risk of injury while inline skating?
You cannot avoid every kind of risk. For example, if you play a sport, you risk injury. Wearing protective gear reduces the chance of injury but does not eliminate it completely. Risks that can be avoided often involve risk behaviors, which are actions or choices that may harm you or others. Smoking cigarettes is a risk behavior; riding in a car without wearing a safety belt is another.

**Reading Check** Identify What are risk behaviors?

**Risks and Consequences**

Risk behaviors have consequences. Consequences are the results of actions. Some risks have consequences that may not be physically dangerous and may affect only you. If you choose not to study for a test, for example, you risk getting a low score on the test. Other risks can have serious consequences. For example, picking a fight at school can hurt both you and others.

**Reading Check** Identify What are consequences?

**Teens and Risks**

Many teens know ways in which to reduce risks related to the health problems of adolescence. They know, for example, that using tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs are risk behaviors that have many serious effects on health and wellness.

Many teens also know how to compare the benefits and risks of activities to reduce risk to themselves. For example, they know that wearing a safety belt will help protect them in the event of a motor vehicle accident. Most middle-school students make sure to buckle up when riding in a vehicle. Teens also understand that regular exercise helps fight heart disease and other illnesses. Most teens try to be physically active. See Figure 1.5 for more information on how teens choose behaviors that help them avoid risk and protect their health.

**How Risks Add Up**

On its own, a risk may not seem that dangerous. The greater the number of risks, however, the greater the chances of negative consequences. For example, jogging on a busy street is one risk factor. Jogging on a busy street at night adds another risk factor. Jogging along a busy street at night during a rainstorm greatly increases the chances of serious injury. Or, eating a diet full of

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**Academic Vocabulary**

- **benefits** (BEN uh fits) (noun) positive things. One of the benefits of healthful eating is having enough energy to get through your day.
high-fat foods is one risk factor. Not getting regular exercise is another risk factor. These two risks combined greatly increase a person’s chances of developing heart disease. When one risk factor adds to another to increase danger, it is called cumulative risk.

Is It Worth the Risk?

You travel to school and other places. You play sports or enjoy other physical activities. These activities offer you benefits. As with any activity, they also have some risks. Ask yourself, are the benefits greater than the risks? For example, are the benefits of playing a sport greater than the risk of getting hurt? Evaluate each risk before making a decision.

Check the facts before making decisions about risks. Study how likely it is that a risk behavior will have negative consequences. Research what healthful behaviors can reduce risks. The skill of accessing information can help you do this. For example, research has shown that wearing a safety belt when riding in a vehicle cuts the risk of serious injury in half in the event of a crash. When you know how much risk a behavior carries, you can decide whether it is worth doing.
How to Avoid or Reduce Risks

Practicing prevention means taking steps to avoid something. This is the best way to deal with avoidable risks. For example, wear a helmet when you ride a bike to help prevent head injury. Slow down on wet or icy pavement to help prevent a fall. Prevention also means watching out for possible dangers. When you know what dangers lie ahead, you can avoid them. See Figure 1.6 for tips on protecting yourself from risks. By following these tips, you can prevent many accidents and injuries. Take responsibility for your personal health behaviors by working to reduce risks.

**Reading Check**
List What are two main ways to avoid or reduce risk?

**Figure 1.6**

**Tips for Reducing Risk**
Risk-reducing behaviors are key to maintaining your overall health. What other actions can you take to reduce risks?

- Plan ahead.
- Think about consequences.
- Resist negative pressure from others.
- Stay away from risk takers.
- Pay attention to what you are doing.
- Know your limits.
- Be aware of dangers.
Risks and Your Total Health

Abstinence is the conscious, active choice not to participate in high-risk behaviors. If you choose not to smoke, you will reduce your risk of getting lung cancer. If you stay away from alcohol, illegal drugs, and sexual activity, you will avoid the many negative consequences of these risky behaviors.

By practicing abstinence from risk behaviors, you take an active role in caring for your health. This will benefit each part of your health triangle. Avoiding risk behaviors will help prevent illness and injuries, contributing to your physical health. When you take steps to reduce risks, you can feel good about making responsible health choices. This helps strengthen your mental/emotional health. In many cases, practicing abstinence from risk behaviors and reducing unavoidable risks can help keep others safe, too. This will benefit your social health.

Reading Check Explain How can avoiding risk behaviors benefit your physical health?

Lesson 4 Review

After You Read

Review this lesson for new terms, major headings, and Reading Checks.

What I Learned

1. **Vocabulary** Define prevention and use it in a sentence.

2. **Give Examples** Name three risk behaviors that can have negative health consequences.

3. **Explain** What does abstinence mean? Give an example of practicing abstinence.

4. **List** Name two or more risk factors that can create a cumulative risk.

Thinking Critically

5. **Hypothesize** Suppose two teens are riding their bikes on a busy street at night. One is wearing a helmet and the other is not.

Describe the risks that both teens are taking. What possible consequences do these risks carry?

6. **Apply** Give an example of how prevention can help a person avoid a risk.

Applying Health Skills

7. **Refusal Skills** Suppose a peer asks you to participate in a high-risk behavior such as drinking alcohol. Write a dialogue between you and the peer in which you use refusal skills to say no to this risky behavior.