

# fact pack

5 hot topics  
for young women



FACTPACK WAS WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY  
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# What **iS** FactPack?

## 5 Hot Topics for Young Women

### Why is this information for young women only?

Both young women and young men use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Young women and young men have some of the same problems. So why is FactPack for young women only? Here's why:

- Young women's lives can be very different from young men's lives.
- The way young women cope with problems is often very different from the way young men cope.
- Our society expects different things from young women than from young men.
- More young women than young men smoke.

### How was FactPack written?

FactPack was written with the help of many young women. They told us there was enough information available to them already about smoking, alcohol, and other drugs. What young women wanted instead was information about issues in their lives that lead to smoking, drinking, and drug use. They identified the main topic areas - the 5 hot topics - of most importance to young women. So that's what we did. And we tried to make the information as easy to read as possible.



# Have you heard it before? **all**

## News for Young Women about Smoking

### Why young women smoke

Young women smoke for many reasons.

You might smoke to:

- experiment ... but then you end up hooked before you know it
- control your feelings, such as anger, stress, or boredom
- control your weight
- fit in or feel grown up
- make yourself look older or more sophisticated

### Facts about cigarettes and smoking

You probably know a lot about what smoking does to your health. You've heard it all before. You already know about getting lung cancer or heart disease. But did you know ...

- Cigarettes are more addictive than cocaine or heroin.
- When you smoke, you inhale 4000 chemicals, such as paint stripper, white ant poison, and a poison used in gas chambers.
- Cigarettes kill trees! 1 in 8 trees is used to make cigarettes and cigarette packages.
- Most people, even smokers, really hate the smell that smoke leaves on you and your clothes.
- If you smoke and take the Pill, your chances are even higher of getting some diseases (such as strokes and some cancers).



## Cigarette advertising is aimed at you!

Cigarette companies want young women to smoke. That's how they make their money. Some ways that cigarette ads affect young women are:

- Ads always make women who smoke look sexy and glamorous.
- Cigarette companies never place ads in magazines that write about the dangers of smoking. So some magazines (such as Cosmo) don't talk about smoking in their health articles. The magazines don't want to lose money from tobacco ads.
- In Canada, it's illegal to advertise for tobacco on billboards and in magazines geared to young women. So the cigarette companies get around this by sponsoring events in sports, music, or fashion.

## Facts about quitting smoking

- You don't always gain weight if you cut down or quit smoking. (Only about a third of young women who quit smoking gain weight.)
- Don't be fooled! You can become addicted to cigarettes very quickly. So you might find it hard to quit even if you don't smoke very much or very often.
- The longer you smoke, the harder it is to quit. If you smoke for a long time, then quitting smoking can be harder than quitting cocaine or heroin.
- Most adult women try to quit smoking at least seven times before they quit for good. It's easier to try to quit when you're young.
- Most young women who smoke want to quit, but find quitting difficult. It's especially hard if you're under a lot of stress or if you're around people who smoke.

There are lots of programs available for young women who smoke. Look at the back of this booklet for more information.



# Do you like yourself?

News for Young Women about Self Image

## What is self image?

Self image is the way you feel about yourself. Sometimes self image is called self esteem. Many young women have a low self image. They don't feel good about themselves.

## Why do young women have a low self image?

It's hard for young women to feel good about themselves. Some reasons you might have a low self image are:

- You aren't happy with your weight or the way you look.
- You can't afford, or don't like to wear, clothes that are in style.
- You feel like you're the only one who isn't popular and confident, which can make you feel lonely.
- You don't have a boyfriend or you don't want a boyfriend.
- You have problems with school, your family, or your friends.

Our society makes young women feel like they have to be perfect to fit in. You don't have to be perfect. What's most important is feeling good about yourself.

But some things that happen to some young women can make it difficult to feel good about yourself, such as:

- You're wondering if you're lesbian or bisexual and you're afraid to talk about it because people might not understand.
- You have a disability and people are mean or make fun of you.
- Most of the people around you are a different race or religion, so you might not feel accepted.
- You are being physically or sexually abused or you have to watch someone else be abused.

- Your parents are getting divorced or kicking you out - this can make you feel depressed.

Other people might not understand your situation. This can be hard on your self image.

## What can happen if you have a low self image?

A low self image can cause a lot of problems. Or, it can make other problems worse. Eating disorders (such as anorexia or bulimia), depression (even suicide), and alcohol or drug abuse can all be the result of a low self image.

## Alcohol or drugs don't improve your self image

Sometimes young women turn to alcohol or drugs to improve their self image. You might not be aware that you're doing this. You might feel like a new person after getting high or having a few drinks! Suddenly you feel better about yourself. But alcohol and drugs give you a false sense of confidence and courage. You could be gaining a problem instead of dealing with one.

## When using alcohol or drugs to cope becomes a problem

Alcohol or drugs are not the answer to problems. You could start using too much too often. You might find the more you use, the more you need.

Alcohol and drugs can cause more problems than they help. The problems you had are still there. They could even be worse because you feel guilty or sick.

## Feeling good without alcohol or drugs

It's often hard for young women to feel good about themselves. You are not alone. Try talking to someone you trust, such as someone in your family, or a school counsellor. And talk to a friend who understands what you're going through. You will probably find a lot of your friends feel the same way you do. Look at the back of this booklet for other places where you can get help that is private and confidential.

# Are you ready for this?

News for Young Women about Sexual Health

## What is sexual health?

Sexual health means you try to protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). This includes:

- HIV (the virus that leads to AIDS)
- chlamydia, gonorrhea, or syphilis (clap or dose)
- herpes or genital warts
- body lice (or crabs)
- Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C

## How do you get an STD?

- You have intercourse with a male partner who doesn't use a condom. This is called unprotected or unsafe sex. It's the most common way to get STDs.
- You have unprotected oral sex. You can get chlamydia or gonorrhea in your throat.
- You share a needle to inject drugs. You can get Hepatitis or HIV. There is always some blood on a used needle. This gets into your blood when you inject.

## Facts about STD's

1. Anyone can get an STD. It doesn't matter if you're male or female. It doesn't matter if you're gay or straight. It doesn't matter what race you are.
2. More women are getting AIDS. More straight people are getting AIDS, too.



3. Different STDs have different effects. Some make you sterile (so you can't have children). Some cause pain, blisters, and sores. Some STDs can kill you. If you have any kind of STD, make sure you get treatment.

## Alcohol and drugs can affect your choices about sex in different ways ...

Be careful if you mix alcohol and drugs with sex. You don't think as clearly when you drink or take drugs, so:

- You feel more confident and in control - but really you're taking more risks.
- You might forget to practice safer sex, or not even care about it.
- Even if you do practice safer sex, unsafe things can still happen (such as, you can't put the condom on right).

## Safer sex

Safer sex is up to both you and your partner. The Pill or other birth control methods alone aren't enough. Here are some safer sex ideas:

- Always use lubricated latex condoms. Carry your own condoms. Don't expect your partner will have one!
- Use water based lubricants, such as KY Jelly. This stops the condom from tearing. Don't use Vaseline. It breaks down the latex in the condom.
- See a doctor immediately if you think you have an STD. Ask your doctor if you should have an HIV test. And ask for more information about ways to practise safer sex.

There are many choices to make before you become sexually active. They include choosing a birth control method and having regular check-ups. If you're not ready to be responsible for these decisions, you're not ready to have sex. Remember: it's your right to decide when to have sex. And it's your right to choose not to have sex. Look at the back of this booklet for more information about sexual health.



# Are you

# pregnant?

## News for Young Women about Pregnancy

### Young women, stress, and pregnancy

Some young women think pregnancy is a time full of love and excitement. For some young women, pregnancy can be like this. But the reality is often very different. Here are some examples:

- you don't know who you can trust or talk to
- you don't have support from your partner or family
- you feel lonely and isolated
- your friends treat you differently

Other people might not understand your situation. This can be hard on you. And other things can make pregnancy even more difficult for young women. Here are some examples:

- you are still in school
- you don't have enough money
- you have other children
- your partner or parents abuse you

### Take care of you, too!

Your mental, physical, and emotional health are important whether or not you're pregnant. Being healthy and feeling good about yourself go together. Remember these things:

- You need to eat well to stay healthy and have a healthy baby. Gaining weight is part of being pregnant. Pregnant women need an extra 300 calories per day. Breastfeeding women need an extra 450. And pregnant teenagers who are still growing themselves will need even more. So this is not the time to diet!
- Keep doing things you enjoy unless they are unhealthy for you and your baby. You will know what feels best for both of you.



- Try not to give up your own dreams. For example, even though it's not always easy, you can stay in school and be a mom. Some schools even have childcare.
- Find someone to help out. Then you can get the private time you need. Ask your friends and family for support. There are also school and community programs available for teenage moms. Look at the back of this booklet for places to call. Don't give up. Keep looking until you get the support you need. And try not to get discouraged.

## Your partner

If possible, talk to your partner. Remember: they are probably going through a lot of difficult emotions, too. Find out what they want. Then decide how much involvement you want, or can count on, from them. It depends on your relationship. Partners can share the work. Or you might decide you don't want their help. Or they might decide they don't want to be involved. Try to come to an agreement that works for both of you. Sometimes counselling can help with this decision.

## Single parenthood

Being a parent is difficult. Being a single parent can be even more difficult. But there are ways to make it a little easier. Take advantage of every offer of help. Don't feel guilty. It's OK to take time for yourself. Ask for help from friends and family. Find out what's available in the community to help single moms.

## Alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs

Alcohol, other drugs, and pregnancy aren't a healthy mix. Remember, cigarettes are a drug, too! It's better to cut down on alcohol or drugs when you're pregnant. And it's best not to use at all. If you want to cut down or quit, ask for support if you need it. Make your own decisions. Then ask others to respect them. And ask people not to use alcohol or drugs around you. A healthy baby isn't just your responsibility. Your partner, family, and friends are responsible, too. Look at the back of this booklet for places that offer private and confidential support.



# Is someone hurting you?

News for Young Women  
about Sexual Abuse

## There are many kinds of sexual abuse

Rape is one kind of sexual abuse, but sexual abuse can be a lot of other things, too. Sexual abuse can take place without someone even touching you (such as verbal harassment). Other kinds of sexual abuse include sexual assault or violence, rape or date rape, and incest.

## There are many ways young women can be sexually abused

Some different ways young women can be sexually abused are:

- by a relative (sometimes called incest)
- by a step parent or your mother's boyfriend
- by a friend or boyfriend (sometimes called date rape)
- by a teacher, coworker, or someone else you trust and respect
- by a stranger

Abuse or harassment of any kind can make you feel afraid, angry, guilty, or ashamed. You might feel the abuse is your fault. But it's not. You are not to blame. And you are not alone.

## What's the link with alcohol and drugs?

Young women who have been abused or harassed often use alcohol and drugs to make their pain go away. Here are some reasons why. You might want to:

- forget painful memories
- cope with painful feelings, such as guilt, shame, or fear

- live with abuse that is happening to you right now
- feel safe having sex with someone you care about
- make it easier to talk about your feelings

## Alcohol and drugs can seem like the answer ...

Alcohol and drugs might take away your pain for a little while. But it's not a good idea to use them very often or very much because alcohol and drugs can:

- stop you from finding better answers - you want to help yourself, but might not be able to
- make you feel more hopeless and out of control
- make you lose respect for yourself
- prevent you from protecting yourself in an unsafe situation

## Get help for abuse

Many people are afraid to reach out for help. It's OK to feel afraid. But it's important to talk to someone you trust. They can support you. And they can help you find more support if you need it. Look at the back of this booklet for places that provide private and confidential help.

## Get ideas about using alcohol or drugs safely

Drinking or using drugs doesn't mean you're an alcoholic or drug addict. But get some advice about your use of alcohol or drugs. Look at the back of this booklet for places that provide private and confidential support.

**Remember:** it's never your fault if you have been sexually abused or harassed!



# Want **more** information?

Where to get more information and support if you need it

Start by asking the counsellor or adolescent care worker at your school. Talk to your family doctor. Or try the private and confidential places listed below. The inside front cover of the phone book has emergency numbers. Check the white pages. Or look in the yellow pages under 'S' for social services, 'W' for women's services, or 'A' for addiction (or alcohol and drug) services. Or ask the operator for the right number. Phone these numbers to get information only. You don't have to leave your name or make an appointment. It's your choice.

## Where to get **support**

### 1 Support for smoking, alcohol, and other drug problems

#### **Alcohol & Drug Assessment Services**

This is a good place to start. The counsellors know about all the services that are available. They will help you decide which is best for you.

#### **Health Units or Public Health Units**

They have up-to-date information and support for young women who smoke.

### 2 Support for pregnancy

#### **Health Units or Public Health Units**

They help pregnant women be healthy in many different ways. Phone for more information.

#### **Maternity Homes**

These provide young, single, pregnant women with support and housing before and after the birth of their baby.

#### **Better Beginnings**

There are eight Better Beginnings programs in Ontario (in Cornwall, Etobicoke, Guelph, Kingston, Ottawa, Sudbury, Toronto, and

Walpole Island). They have many programs for women before, during, and after pregnancy.

### 3 Support for violence and abuse

#### **Interval Houses or Women's Shelters**

These are safe homes for women and kids who have been abused. Or you can phone them to get names of counsellors in your area. Many shelters have free 800 phone numbers.

#### **Sexual Assault, Rape Crisis, or Women's Centres**

These centres help with present or past abuse. Most offer free or low cost counselling. Or they can give you names of counsellors in your area.

#### **Assaulted Women's Help Line**

This is for women who are physically, emotionally, or sexually abused. They provide counselling over the phone. And they can give you numbers of the shelter or sexual assault crisis centre closest to you. Phone Toll Free 1-866-0511 Or Toll Free TTY 1-866-863-7868 You can also visit their website for more information: <http://www.awhl.org/>

#### 4 Support for other issues

##### **Crisis Lines**

There are many kinds of crisis lines. Some are talk lines. Others are for emergencies such as assault.

##### **Community Health or Mental Health Centres**

Community Health Centres (CHC) have doctors, social workers, and nurses on staff. They help with medical problems and offer support or counselling. Community Mental Health Centres provide support and counselling. And they can refer you to a doctor if you need one.

## Where to get information

#### 1 Information about alcohol and other drugs

**Motherisk.** They have information about alcohol, drugs, and pregnancy. They can give you advice and information. Phone (416) 813-6780 or visit their website at <http://www.motherisk.org/women/index.jsp>.

**Addiction Research Foundation.** They can give you information about alcohol, drugs, and pregnancy. They also have general alcohol and drug information. Local ARF offices can refer you to services in your area. Contact the central office at 1-800-463-6273. You can also look at their website at [www.camh.net](http://www.camh.net).

#### 2 Information about violence and abuse

**Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH).** They will know of a women's shelter near you. Phone (416) 977-6619, or visit <http://www.oaith.ca/>

**National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.** They have written information and other resources. Phone for free at 1-800-267-1291 or visit <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/index.html>.

#### 3 Information about other issues

**Association of Community Information Centres of Ontario.** They will refer you to a Community Information Centre (CIC) near you. CIC's can refer you for help with many problems, such as counselling, housing, or general information. Phone the Association at the Ancaster Information Centre at (905) 648-6675, or dial 211 in some areas.

**National Eating Disorder Information Centre.** Phone them at 1-866-633-4220, or visit <http://www.nedic.ca/index.shtml>.

**ACCESS ONTARIO.** They have information and referral to programs and services funded by the government. Phone for free at 1-800-268-8758.

**Daily Bread.** They have listings of all the Food Banks in Ontario. Phone (416) 203-0050, or go online: <http://www.dailybread.ca/>.

**Regional Housing Programs Office.** They can provide information on the local Housing Authority nearest you. Phone for free at 1-800-267-6108.

**Canadian Mental Health Association.** They educate the public about mental health. They also have information about mental health services in your community. Phone for free 1-800-368-0999, or go online: <http://www.cmha.ca>.

**Ontario AIDS Hotline.** Phone 1-800-668-2437.

