

Influences on Your Health

Imagine that the story of your health were made into a video. The video would portray your health from the day you were born until today. It would show how you felt and functioned at each stage. The uniqueness of your video would be partly a result of the decisions you have made in your life that affected your overall well-being.

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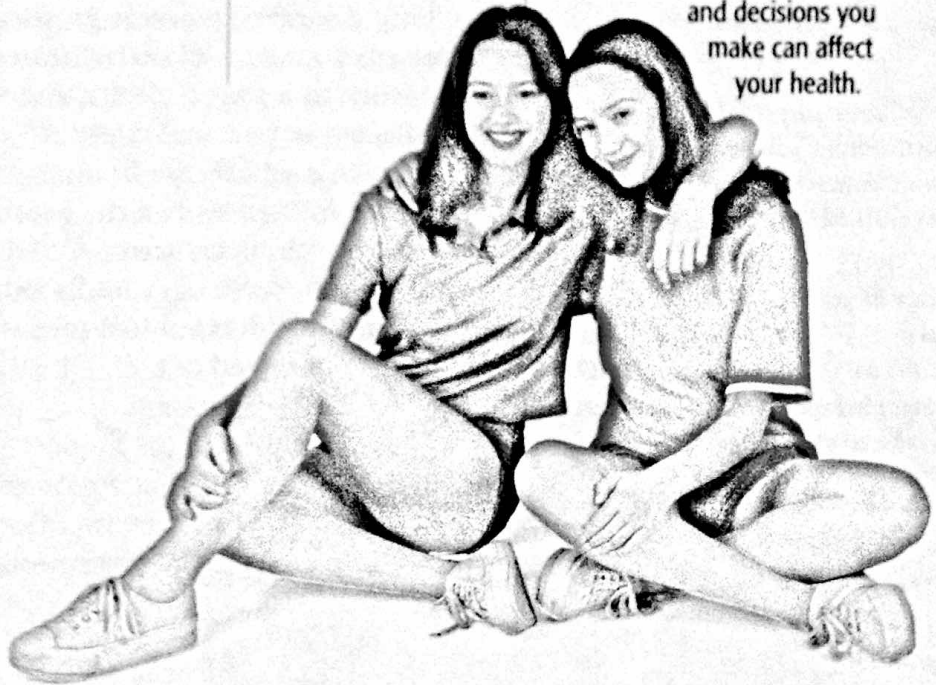
heredity For more information on heredity and its impact on health, see Chapter 20, page 461.

HEALTH TERMS

heredity
environment
peers
culture

HEALTH CONCEPTS

- Your health is affected by a number of factors over which you have no control.
- Your heredity, environment, and culture influence your health.
- Your behaviors and the choices and decisions you make can affect your health.



Heredity

To some degree, your general level of health was determined before you were born. You are a product of **heredity**. **Heredity** is *all the traits and properties that are passed along biologically from both parents to child*. The most obvious traits are physical ones such as the color of your hair and eyes, the shape of your nose and ears, and your body type and size. You also inherit basic intellectual abilities. Tendencies toward specific diseases can also be inherited.

Environment

Your health is also influenced by your environment. **Environment** is *the sum total of your surroundings—your family, where you grew up, where you live now, and all of your experiences*. Environment includes all

the places you go in a given day and the physical conditions in which you live. It also includes the people in your life—your *social environment*. Yet another aspect of your environment is your culture.

Physical Environment

Your physical environment can affect all areas of your health. How would you describe your environment? Are there parks, jogging paths, and recreational facilities? Is the environment clean and are the streets safe? A person living in this environment may be more likely to enjoy good physical and mental health. In contrast, a person living in an area with a high crime rate, for example, may experience stress and feel threatened for his or her personal safety.

Other aspects of your physical environment that can influence your health include air quality. Pollutants, such as smog and smoke from other people's cigarettes, can increase your chances of developing lung disorders, whereas growing up in a community with clean air lessens your risks of such diseases. Indoor aspects of your environment, such as a frayed electrical cord plugged into a wall socket, can also affect your personal safety.

Access to medical care is another aspect of one's physical environment that influences health. Because of the rising costs of medical care and health insurance in recent years, many people are unable to afford health services. Childhood immunizations are often overlooked, and this has led to a re-emergence of diseases that were once thought to be wiped out.

▼ **Your physical environment influences your total health and contributes to your sense of well-being.**

ACTIVITY Describe characteristics of your physical environment. What parts contribute to a healthful environment? Are there aspects that pose risks to your health?



OVERCOMING THE ODDS



“I’m the type of person, though, that if I see trouble here to my left, I go to my right.”

Emanuel Carvajal is 16. He is a passionate artist who lives in a section of New York City with his mother and sister. He is also a member of Kids of Survival (KOS), an after-school, inner-city arts program for talented teen artists in the neighborhood. Founded by teacher and artist Tim Rollins, Kids of Survival is committed to education, discipline, clean living, and hard work. Emanuel feels lucky to be a part of it.

“When I first met Tim,” Emanuel recalls, “he gave me a piece of paper and a pencil and said, ‘You have 30 minutes right now to draw the best thing you ever drew in your life.’ He loved what I did...and I’ve now been in the group almost two years.

“Kids of Survival meets every day after school. We go to Tim’s studio, where we set our minds to our painting. Tim always has a plan. We start shooting ideas...brainstorming. Usually we stay there doing our art until dinnertime. The rules of Kids of Survival are very strict, but they help us a lot. You have to have a certain grade-point average, attend school, have no gang association, and no violent behavior. You have to stay honest, and you can do no drugs, no alcohol, no sex, and you always have to be respectful.”

Emanuel admits that Tim is tough on the members, but the toughness has paid off. Some of the students’ best

paintings hang on the walls of major museums, and some have sold at high prices.

Emanuel acknowledges that he’s had some rough times. “My area of New York,” he observes, “is not as dangerous as some areas, but it’s still dangerous. There are drug dealers on the corner and sometimes stupid arguments start breaking out. It’s happened in front of my face. I’m the type of person, though, that if I see trouble here to my left, I go to my right.”

What has Emanuel learned from his experiences in Kids of Survival?

“I think this is a tough time for kids. Because of computers, I believe that if you aren’t learning a skill, you’re going to have a hard time getting a job. Stay in school, I always say. Learn a skill. You can develop your abilities or do something you believe in, if you’ll just try. Follow what you want to do, and remember this: Use all the help you can get, and *never* give up.”

EMANUEL’S STORY

1. How has Emanuel’s physical and social environment influenced him?
2. What caring adults have played a role in Emanuel’s success?
3. How do the rules of Kids of Survival help guide Emanuel?

YOUR STORY

1. How does your physical and social environment influence you?
2. Who are the caring adults who influence your life and help you be successful?

Social Environment

Your social environment includes your family and other people with whom you come into daily contact. A person who is surrounded by individuals who show support, love, strength, and encouragement may have a positive self-image and, as a result, reach out and support others. A healthful, supportive social environment can even help a person to rise above adverse physical conditions, such as poverty. On the other hand, a person from an unhealthy social environment may suffer poor mental and emotional health as a result of rejection, neglect, verbal abuse, or other negative behaviors.

An important part of your social environment, especially during the teen years, is your peers. **Peers** are *people the same age who share a similar range of interests*. Your peers include your friends and classmates. Peers who are loyal and supportive friends can help you grow mentally and socially. At the same time, peers who take part in dangerous, unhealthy, or illegal behaviors like using tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs can put pressure on you to be “part of the group.” Standing up to this **peer pressure** can be challenging. One way is by choosing friends who care about their health and yours.

Cultural Environment

Culture is *the collective beliefs, customs, and behaviors of a group*. This group may be an ethnic group, a community, a nation, or an entire section of the globe. The language your family speaks at home, the foods you prefer to eat, and the traditions and religion you practice are all part of your cultural environment.

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peer pressure For more information on peer pressure and strategies for dealing with it, see Chapter 13, page 304.

▼ **Your peers are an important part of your social environment.**

ACTIVITY *Identify some of the choices and decisions you have made that were influenced by your peers. How does your social environment contribute to positive health behaviors?*



Finding a Cure

For centuries, the disease called tuberculosis, TB, has been in existence. TB usually attacks the lungs, and once it has settled in the lungs, it is contagious. If the sick person sneezes or coughs, the disease can be passed through the air to another person.

In the past, strange cures for tuberculosis were suggested. They included drinking elephant's blood and touching the hand of a king or queen. Near the end of the nineteenth century, doctors believed that fresh air and relaxation could help patients with tuberculosis. Sanitariums, living areas set aside for ill people, were set up.

Fresh air alone could not cure the disease, however. Until the middle of the twentieth century, tuberculosis was the number one killer in the United States. In 1944, Dr. Selman Walksman helped to change that with his discovery of a drug called streptomycin. This drug helped control the disease.

Recently, the number of cases of tuberculosis has been on the rise again. People with illnesses such as AIDS have very weak immune systems, and their bodies are not able to battle this infection. Poor health care, poor hygiene, poor nutrition, a lack of health care and crowded living conditions also contribute to tuberculosis.

1. Why do diseases such as tuberculosis become public health concerns?
2. What other cures for diseases have been discovered in the twentieth century?



Understanding culture can help you understand yourself and get along with others. Culture can help you see what all people have in common. It can help you recognize the variety of ways in which people solve the same basic problems. Finally, your culture gives you a sense of identity as you take your place in a multicultural world.

Behavior

Although you have little or no control over your heredity and environment, you have a great deal of control over one factor affecting your life: your behavior. The way you choose to act within your environment and with your inherited abilities has a very important impact on who you are.

Suppose your family has a history of cardiovascular disease. Does this mean you must "follow in their footsteps"? Not at all! You can reduce your chances of developing this condition through positive

choices and habits. You can reduce your intake of fried foods and other foods high in fat. You can also develop the positive habit of regularly participating in physical activity and exercise.

Similarly, if you are aware of environmental health influences, you have the ability to take positive action to protect your health. If there is a nonworking smoke detector in your home, you can replace the battery. You can wear sunscreen to protect your skin when you're in the sun. If you know about the dangers associated with cigarette smoke, you can try to avoid being near smokers.

By being aware—by becoming more health literate—you can take positive action to protect your health and the health of others. You can also take advantage of positive hereditary and environmental influences.

Your Behavior, Your Health

Can you recall your health video, discussed at the beginning of this lesson? Imagine that you could keep adding to this video, showing how the decisions you make today will affect your health tomorrow or how the decisions you make tomorrow will affect the rest of your life.

The simple fact is that the remainder of the video is, for the most part, in your hands. True, some factors influencing your health are out of your control, but most of the decisions affecting your health are yours to make. You and nobody else are the video's director. Sit down in the director's chair, and get ready to take responsibility for your health—and your life.

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Review

Reviewing Facts and Vocabulary

1. Define *heredity*. Give an example of how heredity can positively influence your health.
2. In your own words, define *physical environment*, *social environment*, and *cultural environment*.

Thinking Critically

3. **Synthesizing.** A *treatment* is a written description of events and images in a movie or video. Write a two-page treatment for a video of your health to date. Make sure to cover all important highlights.

4. **Analyzing.** Explain how peer pressure can be a positive or negative influence in your life. Why is it sometimes difficult to resist? Tell why it is important to resist the pressure to do something that is dangerous, unhealthy, or illegal.

Applying Health Skills

5. **In Your School.** Identify the resources in your school and community that contribute to the well-being of its citizens. Make a poster or pamphlet describing these resources.