With time, all people with spina bifida will transition from pediatric to adult providers. Now that you are getting older, it is important to take an active role in your health and managing your life as an adult. We created this fact sheet about spina bifida as a tool to help you better understand your condition as you make the transition to college, a job, or moving away from your parents.

What is spina bifida?
Spina bifida is a condition that occurs when a baby is still developing in the mother’s womb. It happens when the bones that are supposed to surround and protect the spinal cord do not close completely. This leaves the spinal cord and the nerves that are located in that area exposed and vulnerable to injury. Protecting the spinal cord is very important because it carries messages for movement and sensation back and forth between the brain and the rest of the body. There are different types of spina bifida, and the severity of symptoms depends on the size and location of the defect.

What causes spina bifida?
Spina bifida is caused by both genetic and environmental factors. We now know that folic acid taken by mothers prior to and during their pregnancy helps to reduce the risk of spina bifida in the baby. Other risk factors include: having a close relative with spina bifida, mothers with obesity or insulin-dependent diabetes, and certain medications taken during pregnancy. Even though we are aware of some of the risk factors, we cannot predict when spina bifida will occur.

What are some common complications of spina bifida?
Damage to the spinal cord and the surrounding nerves can result in paralysis or difficulty walking, difficulties with bowel and bladder control, problems with draining the fluid from around the brain (the medical term for this is “hydrocephalus”) and learning difficulties. Some people with spina bifida will have only minor complications, whereas others may have severe complications requiring multiple surgeries and medical support.

Where to go for more information:
- Your current doctor
- Your family
- spinabifidaassociation.org

Our clinic is happy to help you every step of the way in your transition. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to us with questions or concerns.