

Weight Management: A Fact Sheet for Parents

Good eating habits and regular exercise set the most critical foundations for a lifetime of general good health.

What is a healthy diet for teenagers?

A variety of foods, such as vegetables, fruit, and dairy products are critical to getting the recommended amounts of vitamins and minerals. Eating just one type of food from a food group often will result in poor nutrition. To help your teen eat a variety of foods, choose foods from all the colors of the rainbow, such as apples, carrots, bananas, broccoli, and blueberries.

- Healthy diets are low in fats, sugars, and salt.
- Vitamins cannot replace balanced meals and healthy snacks.
- A balanced diet is made up of food from the dairy, meat, vegetable, fruit, and grain groups. The amount needed depends on age, sex, and activity level. It is recommended that teens eat approximately:
 - 6 ounces of grains, with one half of the servings being whole grains (eg, cereal, oatmeal, or brown rice)
 - 2.5 cups of vegetables
 - 1.5 cups of fruits (eg, one apple = 1 cup)
 - 3 cups of dairy products (preferably nonfat and low-fat products)
 - 5 ounces of meat or meat alternatives each day. As an example, 3 ounces of meat is the size of a deck of cards.
- A sedentary (not very active) teenager could require fewer calories, whereas an active teenager could require substantially more calories (Table 1).

How can I help my teenager to eat well?

- Buy healthy foods at the grocery store and limit your purchase of foods that are prepackaged or high in fat or sugars

Get your whole family involved in healthy eating.

Table 1. Approximate Calories By Activity Level Needed to Maintain Weight in a Teenaged Female

Activity Level	Approximate Calories Needed Each Day to Maintain Weight
Not active (you do not exercise at all)	1,800
Somewhat active (you exercise some days of the week)	2,000
Active (you exercise most days of the week)	2,300

- Eat all meals and snacks at the table, not in front of the television.
- Encourage your teenager to eat a healthy breakfast daily.
- Limit the amount of sweets she is allowed to eat.
- Do not make your child eat when she is not hungry.
- Do not use food to comfort or reward (eg, try not to offer dessert as a reward for finishing a meal).
- Do not eat at fast-food restaurants more than once per week.
- If you have any concerns about your child's eating habits, talk with your health care practitioner.

How often should my teenager exercise?

- Experts recommend 60 minutes of moderate physical activity most days of the week for both children and adolescents.
- Exercises may include the following types:
 - Aerobic exercise: A continuous activity in which breathing becomes faster and the heart rate increases. This increases fitness and makes the heart and lungs work better. Some examples include running and swimming.
 - Life exercise: Any physical activity that increases fitness. It can be done every day and become a part of a daily schedule. It may be as easy as walking fast to the mailbox.

How can you help your teenager stay fit?

- Encourage your teenager to exercise for at least 60 minutes most days of the week in ways that can become a part of her life.
- Encourage your teenager to participate in a team or individual sport.
- Make exercise a part of your teenager's daily routine as early in life as possible. Those who are active by age 16 years are less likely to be inactive in adulthood.
- Increase the amount of regular activity she does each day.
 - Urge your teenager to climb stairs instead of taking the elevator.
 - Ask her to help carry in the groceries.
 - Go for walks with your teenager and try to increase the distance gradually.
- Make sure that physical education classes are not her only activity.
- Model healthy behaviors.
- Exercise with your teenager. Get the whole family to go for a walk or a bike ride.
- Limit the amount of time your teenager spends watching television or playing on the computer to less than 2 hours per day.

What are some exercises that you and your teenager can do together?

Do the following life exercise together:

- Taking Stairs
- Walking
- Bicycling

Do the following aerobic exercises together:

- Basketball
- Soccer
- Aerobics class
- Skating
- Jogging
- Swimming

How much should your teenager weigh?

- One third of high-school girls think they are over-weight. In reality, only a small proportion of these teens are overweight.
- Television programs and magazines are filled with thin women, which can give the wrong idea about what is a healthy body weight.
 - Children and adolescents should be helped to identify media messages that are inaccurate and unhealthy.
 - Teenagers should be aware of the media messages aimed at women and young people. Images seen on television and other media sources can be used as a way to open discussions between parents and children.
- A body mass index (BMI) calculation can be used to see if your child's weight is healthy. It is computed as weight (in pounds) divided by height (in inches) squared multiplied by 700. A BMI calculator is available at www.acog.org/goto/teens.
- After you calculate her BMI, compare it to the growth charts found on the web site of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhanes/growthcharts/set1clinical/cj411024.pdf). If she is at or above the 95th percentile, she is over-weight. If she is between the 85th percentile and the 94th percentile, she is at risk of becoming overweight. In either case, you should talk with your daughter and a health professional about this because being overweight affects her health.

How does being overweight affect health?

- Many health concerns directly relate to being over-weight.

- Overweight teenagers are at higher risk of the following health problems:
 - Irregular menstrual periods
 - Severe asthma
 - Sleep disorders
 - High blood pressure levels
 - High cholesterol levels
- If teenagers remain overweight into adulthood, they become at risk of the following serious diseases:
 - Heart disease
 - Stroke
 - Diabetes mellitus
 - Arthritis
 - Gall bladder disease
 - Some cancers, including breast, endometrial (lining of the uterus), kidney, colon and esophageal cancers

What should you do if your teenager is overweight and wants to lose weight?

- Weight loss is recommended only for adolescents in certain circumstances (eg, older overweight adolescents who have completed their growth [in height] or those with one or more medical conditions). In most cases, the goal is to slow the rate of weight gain while achieving normal growth and development.
- Two ways to lose weight are eating less and exercising more. Doing both is best.
- Although most girls rely on dieting to lose weight, regular exercise is the key to helping your teenager reach her goal and stay a healthy weight.
- The first priority should be to help your teenager to exercise regularly and then work to increase the length of time and intensity of exercise.
- A combination of activities will most likely keep her interested in exercise so she will not get bored. Biking, walking, exercise classes, tennis, and swimming can be challenging, and fun.
- A low-calorie diet can be added to an exercise routine as part of a weight loss program.
- Diets should never go below 1,200 calories, the minimum to allow for good nutritional intake. If you have concerns, please contact your health care professional.
- Do not be fooled by fad diets. Although your

teenager may lose weight at first, most girls who follow quick weight loss diets gain the weight back when they stop dieting.

- It is important to note that just because a product is labeled “low fat” does not always mean that the product has fewer calories.
- Dietary pills and products should not be used.
- You do not have to restrict your teenager’s eating to lose weight. Making simple changes such as ordering smaller portions rather than super-sizing the meals can result in weight loss over time.
- A successful weight loss program depends on good planning and an understanding of basic nutrition. A nutritionist can help you figure out a program that is right for your teen. If you decide to make an appointment with a nutritionist, it is a good idea to accompany your teenager if you are the person who usually does the cooking for your family.
- It is important to help your teenager establish a life-long pattern of healthy eating and exercise. Doing so has been shown to help overweight individuals lose weight and keep it off.

What is an eating disorder?

Teenagers with bulimia nervosa typically binge or purge (eat to excess to vomit, take laxatives, or exercise excessively) and may be of high, average or low body weight. Binge eating disorder is when someone eats a large quantity of food but does not purge. Parents of a teenager with either of these problems should seek professional help for their child.

For more information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or their web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

American Academy of Family Physicians Telephone: (913) 906-6000 or (800) 274-2237 Web: www.aafp.org or familydoctor.org

American Academy of Pediatrics Telephone: (847) 434-4000 Web: www.aap.org

American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance Telephone: (703) 476-3400 or (800) 213-7193 Web: www.aahperd.org/index.cfm

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Telephone: (202) 638-5577 or (800) 673-8444 Web: www.acog.org

American College of Sports Medicine Telephone: (317) 637-9200 Web: www.acsm.org

American Dietetic Association Telephone: (800) 877-1600 Web: www.eatright.org

American Heart Association Telephone: (800) AHA-USA-1 (242-8721) Web: www.americanheart.org

Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, Inc. (ANRED) Telephone: (847) 831-3438 Web: www.anred.com

The AWARE Foundation Telephone: (215) 955-9847 Web: www.awarefoundation.org

Center for Young Women's Health Telephone: (617) 355-2994 Web: www.youngwomenshealth.org

MyPyramid.gov USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion Telephone: (888) 7-PYRAMID (779-7264) Web: www.mypyramid.gov

National Agricultural Library Food and Nutrition Information Center Telephone: (301) 504-5414 Web: www.nutrition.gov

National Association for Health & Fitness Telephone: (716) 583-0521 Web: www.physicalfitness.org

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion—Healthy Schools Healthy Youth! Telephone: (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636) Web: www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/index.htm

VERB: www.verbnow.com or <http://www.cdc.gov/spanish/verb> (Spanish)

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Telephone: (301) 592-8573 Web: www.nhlbi.nih.gov

The Obesity Society Telephone: (301) 563-6526 Web: www.obesity.org

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Telephone: (301) 443-4000 Web: www.surgeongeneral.gov

Overweight in Children and Adolescents: www.surgeongeneral.gov/topics/obesity/calltoaction/fact_adolescents.htm