



# Healthful Eating— a Positive Approach



## PARENT FACT SHEET

Teens may believe that most nutrition advice begins with "you can't" or "you shouldn't." Help them make nutrient-dense food choices. Consider your own words and actions. And, catch teens doing something right!

- Eating is one of life's great pleasures.
- A healthful eating style balances food choices over time.
- All foods can fit into a healthful eating style.



### Tips for Parents:

When talking with your teen, explain that body changes are perfectly normal and that his or her body needs healthful food choices to do its best work.

### Their Weight:

Adolescent bodies are programmed for growth. Before they start their growth spurt, some preteens gain weight. They plump out before they shoot up. With a balanced, moderate eating plan and active living, their height can eventually catch up with their weight. Adolescents need reassurance that weight gain at this time is a normal part of growth.

### Tips for Parents:

Adults can help teens most by appreciating differences. Encourage teens to be active and care for themselves. Good health messages and esteem-building experiences are the best ways to motivate teens to care about themselves and their bodies. For growing teens, there is a broad range of what is healthy. Encourage your teen to ask questions and share his or her concerns with you, another trusted adult, or the school nurse or health professional. Offer positive messages on body size and shape for all teens.

### Concerns About Weight:

When it comes to body weight, teens view their bodies differently. Many teens have misconceptions about their size and weight. Girls are more likely to be dissatisfied; they often want a thinner shape. Some heavier girls more often point out the positive aspects of their bodies at larger sizes. There are risks associated with being inactive and overweight, but it is not always clear when a teen is at risk for being overweight or how much weight poses health risks.

Very low-calorie diets are not advised for teens during their growth spurt years. Dieting during early adolescence, age 9–14, may result in higher weights after the teen years than teens who did not diet<sup>1</sup>. Adolescents who are concerned about their weight need to talk with their doctor, school nurse, or other health care provider.



### Tips for Parents:

Again, good health messages provide the best ways to motivate teens to care about themselves and their bodies. Encourage your teen to talk with you about his or her concerns, or the school nurse or other health professional. Offer positive messages on body sizes and shapes for all teens.

Discourage teens from counting calories. It is difficult to precisely count calories for a day. Teens need to develop skills in using the Nutrition Facts label to make choices between foods, and in choosing the kinds and amounts of foods recommended by the MyPyramid Guidance System.

If you want more information about the psycho-social aspects of weight issues for teens, or how the Body Mass Index applies to growing teens, see FNS' *The Power of Choice: Helping Youth Make Healthy Eating and Fitness Decisions* (2003). Weight-related issues are covered. Go to: [teamnutrition.usda.gov](http://teamnutrition.usda.gov) for full-text versions of this publication.

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<sup>1</sup> Relation Between Dieting and Weight Change Among Preadolescents and Adolescents. Field et al, Pediatrics, Vol. 112, # 4, Oct 2003, p. 900-906.



# Active Living: What They Do, What They Need

## PARENT FACT SHEET



**Physical activity**—an important part of a healthier lifestyle.

For people of all ages, physical activity promotes health. There are many great reasons to be active. Share these reasons to get up and move!

### Being physically active helps teens:

- Feel good and look their personal best.
- Have fun with their friends and family!
- Grow into their bodies, especially during awkward growth periods. It helps them get used to how their bodies work and how they are changing.
- Keep their bodies flexible, muscles and bones strong, and physical endurance higher.
- Reduce their body fat. For many, however, weight problems are more complex than just being inactive.
- Improve their self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-control.
- Improve their heart health, and reduce the risk of some health problems, such as heart disease, as they get older.
- Cope with stress and mild depression, and feel more relaxed.

### Teens on the move: keep it up!

Fortunately, most preteens are active as they enter puberty. However, as they move into the teen years, many slow down. Encourage teens to keep up their level of physical activity—not just now but beyond their teen years. Being busy does not mean being physically active. They need to move!

### Stop sitting—get moving!

How much physical activity is enough? Children and adolescents need to get at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day, or on most days. Teens do not need to exercise or be athletes to be physically active. Encourage an active lifestyle that includes walking, using stairs, and other activities. Just by spending less time sitting (watching TV and playing computer games), many teens fit more physical activities into their lives.

### Tips for Parents:

Encourage teens to enjoy being physically active, rather than working out or exercising. Suggest less sitting and more moving around as a big step toward healthier living! Promote physical activity in fun, everyday ways.



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