

HEALTHY BODIES, HEALTHY MINDS

A Tool for Parenting Teens



Teens hear and see many messages on health, body shape and size. Negative messages that focus on weight can harm teens' self-esteem, and lead to poor body image and unhealthy behaviours, like disordered eating. The teenage years is a core time of development and because of the changes happening in the brain, it can be a time of high stress. Some of the most common reasons teens feel stressed are school, relationships, workload, social media, and body image.

Parents and caregivers can play an active role in helping their teens cope with stress and have a healthy body and healthy mind.

Below you will find ways to interact with your teen that will shift the focus from weight to an overall focus on health and mental well-being. These tips can help teens understand that there is much more to health than weight.

Active Living

Being active helps with common teenage challenges; it builds self-confidence, relieves stress, improves sleep and is a fun social activity.

- ◆ Focus on having fun and feeling good, rather than burning fat and calories.
- ◆ Teach your teen to notice how their bodies feel when they are enjoying being active.
- ◆ Introduce your teen to a variety of different types of physical activity so that you find the ones that you and your teen enjoy.
- ◆ Help your teen be comfortable with their body so that they are confident in learning new skills and activities that challenge them (e.g., yoga on a paddle board, track and field activities, gymnastics, and basketball).
- ◆ Avoid taking away physical activity as a punishment. Offer many opportunities for daily physical activity that are fun and rewarding.
- ◆ Let your teen decide which activities they want to participate in. Give them time to be active in an unstructured and natural way (e.g., going for a hike, swimming at the lake, mountain biking with friends).



Balanced & Healthy Eating

Eating regular balanced meals and snacks gives your teen's body and brain the energy they need to stay focused throughout the day, be active, and be healthy mentally and physically.

- ♦ Enjoy and try to provide a variety of tasty and nutritious foods, including: colourful vegetables and fruit, whole grains, lower fat milk and fortified milk alternatives (e.g., soy beverage with added calcium and vitamin D), and lean meat and alternatives.
- ♦ Avoid labelling foods as “good” or “bad” as this can link emotions to food. Instead, use words to describe the taste and texture of food (e.g., crunchy, salty, sweet, tasty, or soft). Refer to foods by their actual name (e.g., carrots, yogurt, bread, potato chips, banana, cookie, or chicken).
- ♦ Eat balanced and regular meals and snacks, including breakfast. Enjoy all foods in moderation and without guilt.
- ♦ Listen to your body and be comfortable eating when you are hungry and stopping when you are full. Encourage your teen to do the same.
- ♦ Eat together when possible, away from screens and other distractions.
- ♦ Involve your teen in meal planning and preparation, grocery shopping, and clean-up.
- ♦ Advocate for access to nutritious foods where teens play, learn and live.
- ♦ Use non-food items to reward your teen and avoid linking rewards to food.

Mental Well-Being & Stress Management

Talking about and role modelling healthy ways to manage stress is helpful in building your teen's life skills.

- ♦ Take care of your body and role model balanced eating, physical activity, and sleep. Recognize and feel good about your body, talents and abilities.
- ♦ Share positive ways to cope with challenges in life with your teen and maintain a supportive parenting relationship with your teen so that they feel comfortable coming to you for help.
- ♦ Find opportunities to spend time with your teen. Do activities you enjoy together to create positive memories (e.g., go out to lunch, explore local parks, take a class together).
- ♦ Focus on overall health instead of weight. Understand that healthy bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Talk about accepting and respecting all bodies. Avoid weight-focused messages such as “you’ve lost weight, you look great” or “I was bad today, I ate cake”.
- ♦ Role model by complimenting your teen and others on their talents and accomplishments.
- ♦ Listen to what your teens say about themselves, others and media images. Use these opportunities to talk about their feelings and to address any potentially harmful talk.
- ♦ Teach your teen that feeling stress, anxiety and anger is healthy and normal. Share healthy ways to work through problems, learn and overcome challenges. This shows that disappointment can be resolved.
- ♦ Encourage your teen to build connections with other adults or youth who role model Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds messages.

If you are concerned that your teen is having excessive body image concerns and/or disordered eating behaviours, seek professional help as soon as possible. For support, contact: National Eating Disorder Information Centre <http://nedic.ca/> or Hopewell <http://www.hopewell.ca/>

For more parenting tips and local information on Triple P Parenting for teens sessions, call 1-800-660-5853 or visit www.triplep-parenting.ca.



For more information and resources on physical activity, healthy eating and mental well-being, go to www.healthunit.org or call 1-800-660-5853.