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## **BUILDING HEALTHY HABITS: A TEEN GIRL'S GUIDE TO WELL-BEING**

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### **Abstract**

Parents have a huge influence in guiding teenagers to make positive health choices. It is amazing and rewarding to watch the teenager grow up and to help them learn to be independent. This contains information on physical and mental health, including the importance of relaxation and down time, a balanced diet and adequate sleep. Good communication, problem solving skills and self-esteem in teenagers all promote wellbeing by enabling your teenager to express their needs and make healthy personal choices. It can often be difficult to know which health messages are correct and which sources of health information are reliable and trustworthy.

**Key Words:** Health habits, Adolescents girls, Physical and Mental health

### **INTRODUCTION**

Being physically active is a core component of good health and wellbeing. Physical activity is essential for physical, psychological, emotional, and social health, and should be seen as part of everyone's daily lifestyle. The teenagers can lose interest in physical activity. Between school, homework, social activities and even part-time jobs, they are juggling a lot of interests and responsibilities. By supporting and encouraging teenagers to take part in regular physical activity we can help them to develop good habits, which will prove invaluable throughout the rest of their lives. The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland recommend that children and young people (up to 18 years) should be active at a moderate to vigorous intensity for at least 60 minutes a day every day. This should include muscle-strengthening, flexibility and bone-strengthening exercises three times a week. 60 minutes a day can be accumulated by doing a number of shorter sessions during the day.

Healthy eating is about getting the correct amount of nutrients protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals that are needed to maintain both good health and a healthy weight. In order to help with food choices, the food pyramid guide is used. Foods that contain the same type of nutrients are grouped together on each of the shelves of the pyramid. Following the food pyramid will guide you towards the right balance of nutritious foods within your calorie range. While the food pyramid can be used as a guide, it is important that teenagers eat according to their growth rate and physical activity levels. Teenagers begin to make their own choices about food and parents have less influence on what they eat, so it's important they have the right information to make healthy food choices.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To get the girls to focus on the positive things in their life.
- To help them realize that they can find happiness in the things in their surroundings.
- To analyse the factors which influence adolescent food habits.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on the analysis of the secondary data and published in the various journals, annual reports and websites.



Descriptive research includes surveys and fact finding enquires of different kinds. The major purpose of descriptive research is description of the situation as it exists at present. The researcher used secondary data for developing understanding of the pivotal role in the current issue of Building Healthy Habits a Teen Girl's Guide to Well-Being.

Nutrition and health, in fact, are two sides of the same coin. Health depends to a large extent on nutrition, and nutrition depends on the food intake. So, food, is the most important single factor for health and fitness.

### **Let us define and describe food, nutrition, health and fitness**

- ❖ **Food** can be defined as anything solid or liquid which when swallowed, digested and assimilated in the body provides it with essential substances called nutrients and keeps it well. It is the basic necessity of life. Food supplies energy, enables growth and repair of tissues and organs. It also protects the body from disease and regulates body functions.
- ❖ **Nutrition** is defined as the science of foods, nutrients and other substances they contain; and of their actions within the body including ingestion, digestion, absorption, metabolism and excretion. While this summarises the physiological dimensions, nutrition has social, psychological and economic dimensions too.
- ❖ **Nutrients** are the constituents in food that must be supplied to the body in suitable amounts. These include carbohydrates, proteins, fats, minerals, vitamins, water and fibre. We need a wide range of nutrients to keep ourselves healthy. Most foods contain more than one nutrient such as milk has proteins, fats, etc. Nutrients can be classified as macronutrients and micronutrients on the basis of the required quantity to be consumed by us every day.

How to encourage healthy eating habits in teenagers?

The teenage child gains independence and makes more of their own food choices, you can encourage healthy habits by:

- Being a healthy eating role model
- Creating a healthy food environment at home
- Talking about healthy eating in positive ways.

### **Role-modelling**

Being a positive food role model is one of the best ways to encourage your child's healthy eating habits. This is about showing your child that healthy eating is important to you. There are many ways you can do this – for example, by always eating breakfast and by choosing healthy food options when you're eating away from home or food shopping. Making time to enjoy healthy meals as a family is one of the best ways to model healthy habits and increase your child's interest in healthy food and nutrition. It's also a good way to spend family time together catching up on everyone's day.

### **Creating a healthy food environment**

If you have a healthy food environment in your family, it makes it easier for your child to make better choices. Here are some practical ways you can create a healthy food environment:

- ❖ Ask your child to help with your family's food shopping and meal planning.
- ❖ Encourage your child to take responsibility for planning and preparing one healthy family meal a week.
- ❖ Limit unhealthy food options in your home, and make it easy for your child to find healthy food at home. For example, keep a bowl of fruit on the bench, a container of chopped vegies in the fridge, wholegrain bread in the freezer, and wholegrain crackers in the cupboard.

If your child starts learning to cook some simple healthy meals now, it sets them up to make better food choices in the future. Also, if your child feels they have some say about what's on the menu, they're more likely to eat it.



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## Talking about food

The way you talk about food has a big effect on your child's eating habits. Try to emphasise all of the good things about healthy eating, instead of focusing on the effects of unhealthy eating.

These ideas might help:

- ❖ Avoid restricting foods or describing them as 'good', 'bad', 'naughty' and so on. Instead, aim for balance eat healthy most of the time, and every now and then you might like to eat 'sometimes' foods.
- ❖ Teach your child to eat when they're hungry and to stop when they're full. This helps your child learn to recognise whether they're eating out of true hunger or eating out of boredom or tiredness. But you can expect your child to eat a lot more while they're growing and developing.
- ❖ Talk with your child about how food can help with concentration, school, sports performance and wellbeing. This can motivate your child to make healthy choices, and it'll probably mean more to your child than information about longer-term health risks.

## Mental Wellbeing

Teenage years are a time of significant life transitions, physical changes, emotional and intellectual demands. Social media also becomes very much part of their lives at this stage and research shows that this can have a negative impact on their mental health. The changes that occur during this time can manifest in behaviours that can be challenging and hard to understand, leaving parents feeling unsure as to what is part of typical adolescent behaviour and what may cause more concern. Sometimes it can be hard to tell the difference. As a parent you play an important role in supporting your child's mental health. You can promote good mental health by the things you do, say, and the environment you create at home.

## Keeping Your Teenagers Safe

It is internationally recommended that children and young people should not drink or take drugs until early to mid-twenties as their bodies and brains are still developing. However, in Ireland despite the legal age for alcohol use being 18 years, the average age for those who start to experiment with substances is around the age of 15 years of age. It can be difficult for parents to prevent children from engaging in this activity. Teenagers and young people's attitudes to alcohol and other drugs are influenced by many things - friends, social media, advertising and, not least, the Irish drinking culture. Fortunately, in spite of these many influences, parents remain the single strongest influence on their child's substance use behaviours.

## Getting enough sleep to stay Healthy and be Well Rested.

It is important to get enough sleep no matter how old you are. Sleep helps the body stay healthy and makes it easier to deal with life's challenges. Sleep is proven to help memory and focus as well as improve management of stress and anxiety.

### Teen Sleep Tips...

#### Avoid

- Any Type of screens an hour before bedtime
- Caffeine or energy drinks
- High intensity exercise in the hour before bedtime

#### Try

- Reading a book or magazine
- Warm milk, water or herbal tea
- Invest in an alarm clock rather than using the alarm clock on your phone
- Exercise during the day & have an hour of relaxation time before bed



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## General Health for Parents

We all want to get off the couch to set a healthier routine but with so much information out there, it can be hard to know where to start! With some simple easy steps, you can learn how to create a new healthy habit, whether that is eating better, getting more physically active, or learning how to take care of your mental wellbeing.

**Creating a new habit** - creating new habits can be hard. It takes time and there are bound to be bumps on the road.

**Getting Active** - Being physically active is beneficial for your physical and overall wellbeing. It can help you deal with anxiety and stress.

**Eating Well** - Healthy eating is really important to look after our general health and keep ourselves well. By nourishing our bodies and minds, we can develop a better connection between the food we eat and how we feel and positively impact our physical and mental wellbeing.

**Minding Your Mood** - minding your mood or your mental wellbeing can allow you to enjoy activities you take part in, work productively, cope with normal stresses in life, and realise your own potential.

**Supports** - a wide range of supports and resources on eating well, keeping active and looking after your mental wellbeing.

## What Teenagers Need

Teenagers of all ages need to be given responsibilities appropriate to their age and maturity levels, know the limits and learn the consequences of their behaviour. They need to know about safety in general, have an opportunity to reflect on risk-taking behaviour and become more prepared should they find themselves in danger. Young people need adequate sleep, a balanced diet, access to sports and hobbies, and time to relax with family and friends. While some parents may worry that this may lead to early experimentation, research tells us that the opposite is true. Therefore, as well as learning from school programmes, it is a good idea for you to talk to your child about relationships and sexuality. Teenagers need open communication with parents on many topics and need their support and encouragement.

The teenage child should have age-appropriate responsibilities and understand and respect the limits set for them by you and by society. Their well-being is promoted by them having support when dealing with issues such as bereavement, bullying, divorce and separation. Well-being can be nurtured in social organisations such as school, sport and cultural centres as well as within religious organisations. Poverty, abusive experiences, discrimination based on race, ethnic or religious background or sexual orientation can diminish a young person's well-being and may prevent them from reaching their potential. Whether young people belong to one or two parent families, their overall well-being will be enhanced by the following factors.

- Living in a family with good problem-solving skills.
- Closeness within the family, doing things together and teenagers helping out.
- Positive communication within the family.
- Being helped to learn to take responsibility and make positive choices, meaning greater independence and freedom to make their own choices, especially regarding friends and free time.
- Support to explore, enjoy and develop their varied interests and talents.

## Father's involvement with their children

In an ideal world, children would be reared by both parents in their own home. Of course, sometimes, for many reasons, this is not possible. Whether parenting together or apart, research has shown that there are many benefits when a father remains involved with his children. In the case of boys, fathers often take on the role as the person who shares humour and can "have a laugh" with them and both sexes can enjoy activities with their fathers such as



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playing computer games, football and watching TV together. The involvement of the father with the child at the age of 7 and 11 has been shown to predict the number of national examinations passes at age 16.

### ***Self-Care for Parents***

Understanding teenage development goes a long way in coping with the ups and downs of parenting teenagers.

1. Take time out for yourself to do things you have always enjoyed such as reading, visiting friends, exercise, cinema and so on.
2. Talk to friends who have teenagers and get a perspective on the issues. Talking to the parents of your teenager's friends may be helpful in terms of information sharing and mutual support.
3. Try to lighten up and bring a bit of humour to the job.
4. See if there is a parenting course in your area.
5. Seek out help for yourself in other areas of your life such as with relationship, budgeting, housing, bereavement, bullying, separation etc.

### **KEY POINTS**

1. Physical activity should be included in a teenager's routine while sedentary activities such as watching TV and video gaming should be minimized.
2. A good sleeping routine and proper oral and food hygiene habits should be encouraged.
3. To lower the risk of health problems, teenagers should avoid consuming alcohol and smoking.
4. Screen time should be limited and spending long periods online should be avoided to reduce the risk of internet addiction.
5. The practice of yoga and meditation can improve the physical and mental wellness of teenagers.

### **HEALTH AND FITNESS**

According to World Health Organisation (WHO) "Health is the state of complete physical, emotional, and social well-being, not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity." All of us want to maintain positive health, i.e., a perfect blend of physical, social and mental. Taking adequate amounts of essential nutrients in our diet is necessary to maintain positive health. Physical health is probably the most easily understood aspect. Mental health can be defined as a state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use her or his cognitive and emotional capabilities, function in society, and meet the ordinary demands of everyday life. In other words, the absence of a recognised mental disorder is not necessarily an indicator of mental health. Feeling capable and competent, being able to handle normal levels of stress, maintaining satisfying relationships, and leading an independent life.

**Physical fitness** is good bodily health; it is the result of regular exercise, proper diet and nutrition, and proper rest for physical recovery. The term physical fitness is used in two ways: general fitness (a state of health and well-being) and specific fitness (a task-oriented definition based on the ability to perform specific aspects of sports or occupations). Physical fitness is the capacity of the heart, blood vessels, lungs, and muscles to function at optimal efficiency. Earlier, fitness was defined as the capacity to carry out the day's activities without undue fatigue. Automation, increased leisure time, and changes in lifestyles following the Industrial Revolution meant that this criterion was no longer sufficient. In the present context, optimum efficiency is the key.

### **FACTORS INFLUENCING EATING BEHAVIOUR**

By the time a person reaches adolescence the influences on eating habits are numerous and the formation of those habits is extremely complex, as shown in Figure 3. The growing independence of adolescents, increased participation in social life, and a generally busy schedule of activities have a definite impact on what they eat. They are beginning to buy and prepare more food for themselves and they often eat rapidly and away from home. In order to encourage adolescents to





form reasonably healthy eating habits parents should give their children the opportunity to choose from a range of nourishing foods as they are growing up. By the time they are teenagers they will need some freedom to use the kitchen; this is true for boys as well as for girls. While the basic foundation for eating habits is found in the family, many influences on eating behaviour originate outside the home. The influence of peers can be a useful source of support, as well as a source of stress for the adolescent. Peer influence and support can be helpful for overweight teenagers, although the same peers can also target such adolescents for teasing.

## CONCLUSION

Teens often have a tendency to get influenced by peer pressure or have the inclination to try smoking or alcohol. However, smoking and drinking alcohol frequently can affect their health and behavior. Bad habits can increase the risk of lung disease, gastrointestinal ailments, and other life-threatening health problems. So, educate your teens about cigarettes and encourage them to stay away from smoking and alcohol. Healthy habits go a long way in defining a person's future. Childhood and teenage years are the best time to develop healthy habits since young people are easier to mold. So, as parents, you should encourage healthy habits in your teenagers. Some habits for teens that you may teach them are developing good eating habits, incorporating physical activity in their daily routine, and getting adequate sleep. However, since teenagers get easily influenced by the outside world and their peers, they may show affinity toward bad habits. Hence, your constant support and encouragement are essential to keep them on track and lead them toward a healthy life.

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