
Staying at a Healthy Weight

The keys to reaching or staying at a healthy weight are regular exercise and good eating habits. Some people think exercise and good eating require lots of effort or planning. But that's not true. In fact, the best way to work them into our lives is by making small changes that gradually become part of our routine.

We've all succeeded in making changes that are now ingrained in our lifestyles — learning to brush our teeth, for example. Here's the information you need to make these other healthy habits just as easy.

Regular Exercise

Teens should get 60 minutes or more of physical activity a day. Note the word "activity": As long as you're getting your body moving, it doesn't have to mean doing complicated exercises or hitting the gym every day. All that matters is that each week you get the right balance of activity, including aerobic, strength building, and flexibility exercise. Make exercise a habit by scheduling some every day.

On days when you have soccer practice or an aerobics class, you may have no trouble exercising for an hour or more. But most of us are busy, and 60 minutes a day of activity seems like a lot of time. The good news is that it's OK to divide it into shorter "exercise breaks" throughout the day.

Just as you might have a healthy snack to stop yourself getting hungry, exercise snacks can keep energy levels high. So get up 15 minutes early and do some yoga or other stretching activity. Fast walk or jog for 15 minutes at lunch. Do the same thing after school — or walk or bike home. Add to that taking the stairs, gym class, and walking between classes during the day, and you've probably reached your 60 minutes.

10 Exercise Tips

Here are 10 simple ways to make an exercise lifestyle change:

1. Start today. Go outside for a walk.
2. Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
3. Instead of driving, walk or bike to places like school or a friend's house.
4. If you have to drive, park farther away than you need to and walk the extra distance, if it's safe to do so.
5. Vacuum your room, wash the car, or mow the lawn. It's not a chore — it's an exercise opportunity!
6. Limit your time watching TV; using your smartphone, computer, or other devices; or playing video games (and when you do play, try interactive games that get you moving). Try to keep screen time to no more than 2 hours a day, not including time spent doing homework.
7. Dance. Even in the privacy of your room, letting loose to your favorite tunes could help you burn more than 300 calories an hour!

8. Figure out what type of exercise interests you, then give it a try! Take it slow if you've never done it before. And if you're nervous at first, find an exercise buddy to join you. It's usually easier to stay motivated about exercise if you do something you're interested in.
9. If you get bored or lose interest easily, alternate the kinds of activities you do so they always feel fresh.
10. Be sure to include some activity that gets your heart beating faster, quickens your breathing, and makes you sweat.

Good Eating Habits

Eating well doesn't mean dieting over and over again. In fact, studies have shown that dieting often doesn't work — and diets may have the reverse effect, with dieters gaining back more weight than before they started.

One reason diets don't work is because they can encourage people to think of foods as "good" or "bad," when the truth is everything is OK in moderation. Diets also encourage people to "give up" certain foods, which can make us feel more deprived. And not only do we feel deprived, diets often deplete our bodies of important nutrients. Teens should eat a variety of foods, and there's nothing wrong with the occasional treat. A candy bar somehow tastes more special if we treat ourselves once in a while instead of every day.

The best way to stay at a healthy weight (or lose weight if you need to) is to make healthy food choices daily. For some of us, that means changing our mindset about food. Instead of thinking of food emotionally (for example, as a reward for doing well on a test or as a way to deal with stress), see it for what it is — a practical way to fuel our bodies.

Here are 10 tips for making healthy eating a part of your life:

1. Replace soft drinks, fruit juices, and sports drinks that are loaded with sugar with water, low-fat milk, or sugar-free drinks.
2. Eat at least five servings of fruit and vegetables a day. The fiber will fill you up and you'll get the nutrients and flavors to keep your body satisfied.
3. Choose a variety of foods from all the different food groups - fruits and veggies, grains, including whole grains, protein, and dairy. In addition to getting your fruits and veggies, include whole grains and lean protein at each meal.
4. Make healthier fast-food choices. Pick a small, single-patty burger instead of a large one and a side salad instead of fries. Stick to regular servings — don't supersize! Better yet, avoid fast-food places whenever you can.
5. Keep healthy foods on hand. If your kitchen is stocked with healthy choices like celery, raisins, and peanut butter you can make ants on a log instead of dipping into the cookie jar (you may need to teach your parents a thing or two about food to be sure they buy you the good stuff!).
6. Take your own good-for-you snacks and food on the road so you can avoid the vending machine or convenience store. Try carrot sticks, a piece of fruit, or your own homemade trail mix instead of cookies, chips, or processed foods that tend to be loaded with fat and calories.
7. Eat when you're hungry. If you're tempted to eat because you're bored, that's your mind telling you to find something else to do.
8. Eat a healthy breakfast every day.

9. Don't eat meals or snacks while watching TV because you'll probably end up eating more than you intend to.

10. Pay attention to portion sizes. If a portion is large, cut it in half and put half aside for later — or split it with a friend.

Use your creativity to come up with ways to fit exercise and healthy eating into your life in a way that works for you. We're all different. Your best friend might prefer to schedule some gym time while you'd rather take your Frisbee-playing dog to the park. Knowing what's right for you will make it a lot easier to do!

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How Can I Lose Weight Safely?

Finding a Healthy Weight

Being healthy is really about being at a weight that is right for you. The best way to find out if you are at a healthy weight is to talk to a doctor or dietitian to help you set realistic goals. They can ask about your eating and exercise habits, look at growth charts, and see if you have any health problems.

If the doctor recommends weight loss, then you can follow these simple suggestions to get started:

Tips for Success

The best weight-loss strategies are those that you can keep for a lifetime. That's a long time, so we'll try to keep these suggestions as simple as possible!

Make it a family affair. Ask your mom or dad to lend help and support. The goal is to be healthy and make lifestyle changes that will benefit the whole family. Teens who have the support of their families tend to do better.

Watch your drinks. It's amazing how many calories are in the sodas, juices, coffee drinks, and other sugary beverages. Simply cutting out a bottle of soda or sports drink a day could save 150 calories or more. Drink water or other sugar-free drinks to quench your thirst. Choosing nonfat or low-fat milk is also a good idea.

Start small. Small changes are a lot easier to stick with than drastic ones. For example, give up regular soda or reduce the size of the portions you eat. When you have that down, you can make other changes, like eating vegetables with dinner or walking 10 minutes after school.

Stop eating when you're full. Pay attention as you eat and stop when you're comfortably full. Eating more slowly can help because it takes about 20 minutes for your brain to get the message that you are full. Sometimes taking a break before going for seconds can keep you from eating another serving.

Notice if you are hungry before reaching for a snack. If you eat when you feel upset or bored, try to find something else to do instead, like taking a walk around the block or checking in with a friend. Many people find it's helpful to keep a diary of what they eat and when and what they are feeling. When you have to write it down, you might think twice before eating cookies. Reviewing the diary later can also help identify the emotions that may trigger overeating.

Schedule regular meals and snacks. You can better manage your hunger when you have a predictable meal schedule. Skipping meals can lead to eating more throughout the day. Adding 1 or 2 healthy snacks to your 3 regular meals can help curb hunger.

Eat more fruit and vegetables. Ditch the junk food and dig out the fruits and veggies! Fruits and veggies can help you feel full and keep your heart and the rest of your body healthy. Include a fruit or vegetable with each meal.

Other suggestions for eating well:

- choose whole-wheat bread and other whole grains, like brown rice and oatmeal
- eat a healthy breakfast
- keep portions under control

Avoid fad diets. Fad diets promise quick weight loss. They often involve giving up certain foods or ingredients or eating only particular foods. They don't work in the long run and can be dangerous to your health.

Don't use diet pills or weight loss supplements. Most of the claims these products make are not proven. They often contain hidden ingredients and may cause unwanted side effects, like bloating and diarrhea, or more serious health problems. If you are thinking of trying supplements for weight loss, talk to your doctor first.

Always ask your doctor about weight loss medicines. Prescription weight loss medicines can help some people when paired with healthy lifestyle habits. Some prescription medicines like semaglutide (brand names: Wegovy or Ozempic) are approved for teens but are only right for some people. If you are interested in medicines for weight loss, talk to your doctor.

Don't give up favorite foods. Don't tell yourself you'll never again eat your absolutely favorite peanut butter chocolate ice cream. Making all treats forbidden is sure to make you want them even more. The key to long-term success is making healthy choices most of the time.

Get moving. Don't get stuck thinking you have to play a team sport or take an aerobics class to get exercise. Try a variety of activities from hiking to cycling to dancing until you find ones you like. Everyone has to begin somewhere. It's fine to start out by simply taking a few turns around the block after school and building up your fitness gradually.

Find other ways to fit activity into your day. Walk to school, jog up and down the stairs a couple of times before your morning shower, help your parents in the garden, or dance like nobody is watching — anything that gets you moving. It all adds up to reach your goal of at least 60 minutes of exercise every day.

Build muscle. Adding strength training to your exercise routine can help you reach your weight loss goals as well as give you a toned bod. Try weights, kettlebells, resistance bands, pilates, or push-ups to get strong. A good, well-balanced fitness routine includes aerobic workouts, strength training, and flexibility exercises.

Forgive yourself. So, you were going to have one cracker with spray cheese on it and the next thing you know the can's pumping air and the box is empty! Drink some water, brush your teeth, and move on. Everyone who's ever tried to lose weight has found it challenging. When you slip up, the best idea is to get right back on track and don't look back.

Weight management is about long-term success. Start with small changes that you can stick with and gradually build better habits that can last.

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The Deal With Diets

High-protein diets. Low-fat diets. Vegetarian diets. No-carb diets. With all the focus on dieting, how do you figure out what's healthy and what isn't?

People diet for many reasons. Some are at an unhealthy weight and want to pay closer attention to their eating and exercise habits. Some play sports and want to be in top physical condition. Others may think they would look and feel better if they lost a few pounds.

Lots of people feel pressured to lose weight and try different types of diets. But if you really need to lose weight, focusing on healthy habits — like eating more fruits and veggies, cutting back on treats, and exercising — will help you more than any fad diet.

Can Diets Be Unhealthy?

Everyone needs enough calories to keep their bodies running well. Any diet that drastically cuts calories or doesn't provide enough important nutrients can be harmful. Extreme low-fat diets can be bad for you. Everyone needs some fat in their diet, so no one should eat a completely fat-free diet. About 30% of total calories should come from fat.

Don't fall for diets that cut out food groups, either. A diet that says no carbs — like bread or pasta — or tells you to eat only fruit is unhealthy. You won't get the nutrients you need. Even if you lose weight at first, these diets are hard to stick with and don't usually work in the long run.

How Can I Lose Weight Safely?

Eating healthy meals and snacks and exercising can help you lose weight and support normal growth. Regular exercise can help teens feel healthier and better about themselves.

The best way to diet is to eat a variety of healthy food in the right amount. Choose more fruits and veggies, whole grains, and lean protein, and drink water instead of sugary drinks like soda, juice, and sports drinks. Cut back on fried foods, sweets, chips, and other junk food.

If you're concerned about your weight or think you need to lose weight, talk with your doctor or a registered dietitian.

Healthy Habits

If you are ready to make changes, here are some tried-and-true tips:

- Drink low-fat milk and water instead of sugary drinks.
- Eat at least 5 servings a day of fruits and veggies.
- Include a variety protein in your diet. Protein foods — including lean meat and poultry, seafood, eggs, beans, soy products, and nuts — provide important nutrients and help you feel satisfied.

- Choose whole grains (like whole-wheat bread, brown rice, and oatmeal), which provide fiber to help you feel full.
- Don't skip meals, including breakfast.
- Pay attention to portion sizes.
- Prepare most meals at home. Eating out a lot can cause weight gain.
- Be active every day. Walk to school, sign up for a fitness class, find a sport you like, or dance in your bedroom. It doesn't matter what you do — just move!

Dieting Danger Signs

How do you know if your diet is out of control? Warning signs include:

- continuing to diet, even if you're not overweight
- using diet pills or supplements
- eating in secret, sneaking food, or feeling out of control when you eat
- thinking about food all the time
- restricting activities or avoiding family and friends because of food or need to exercise
- having an intense fear of gaining weight
- vomiting after meals or using laxatives
- feeling weak, lightheaded, or dizzy from not eating

If you, or someone you know, shows any of these signs of an eating disorder, talk to a trusted adult or doctor.

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MyPlate Food Guide

To help people make smart food choices, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) designed an easy-to-follow symbol: *MyPlate*. The plate graphic, with its different food groups, is a reminder of what — and how much — we should put on our plates to eat healthy.

How MyPlate Works

MyPlate has sections for vegetables, fruits, grains, and protein foods, as well as a "cup" on the side for dairy. Color-coded sections — green for veggies, red for fruits, orange for grains, purple for protein, and blue for dairy — show at a glance how much of these foods to eat.

MyPlate reminds us to:

- Choose variety: The best meals have a balance of items from different food groups.
- Make half of your plate vegetables and fruits.
- Make at least half of your grain servings whole grains.
- Drink fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk and water instead of soda, sports drinks, and other sugary drinks.
- Avoid large portions.

5 Food Groups

Different food groups have different nutrients and health benefits. If you regularly skip a group, over time you won't get the best nutrition.

1. Vegetables

The vegetable portion of MyPlate is shown in green. It's the largest sections on the plate. That's because vegetables provide many of the vitamins and minerals we need for good health. Veggies are naturally low in calories, and the fiber in them helps us feel full.

Choosing variety is important when it comes to vegetables: Dark green vegetables (like broccoli, spinach, and kale) provide different nutrients from orange and red vegetables (like squash, carrots, and sweet potatoes). The "eat your colors" message that you might have learned in grade school is a good one to follow throughout your life.

2. Fruits

Like veggies, fruits have vitamins, minerals, and fiber. The red section of MyPlate is slightly smaller than the green, but together fruits and veggies should fill half your plate. Whole fruit is the best choice: Fruit juices have more sugar and calories per serving than whole fruit, and you're not getting the fiber.

As with veggies, it's good to mix up your fruit choices: a colorful fruit cup is more than just pretty — it's a nutrition powerhouse.

3. Grains

The orange section of MyPlate is about one quarter of the plate. Whole grains (like whole-wheat flour) are more nutritious and have lots of dietary fiber that can help you feel fuller longer. Refined grains (white flour) are more processed, removing vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Most refined grains are enriched, which means that some of the nutrients, but not fiber, are added back after processing.

At least half of the grains you eat should be whole grains like whole-wheat bread, brown rice, or oatmeal.

4. Protein

High-protein foods help the body build and maintain muscles, skin, blood, and other tissues. They also have important vitamins and minerals, like iron.

The purple section of MyPlate is about a quarter of the plate. Foods high in protein include beef, poultry, seafood, dry beans and peas, eggs, nuts, and seeds. Tofu and veggie burgers or vegetarian meat substitutes are also good sources of protein. When eating meats, choose lean or low-fat options.

5. Dairy

The blue circle on the MyPlate graphic represents dairy products that are rich in calcium, like milk, yogurt, and cheese. Calcium-fortified soy milk and soy yogurt are also included in the dairy group. Calcium builds strong bones and teeth. Foods from the dairy group also have protein and vitamin D. Choose fat-free or low-fat dairy products most of the time.

The blue circle shows dairy as a "side" to your meal, like a glass of milk. But dairy can be part of your meal, like a cheese quesadilla, or served as a snack or dessert. Yogurt with fresh fruit or a fruit smoothie made with low-fat milk make great desserts.

How to Make it Work for You

It's easy to follow the MyPlate graphic if you're eating a "meat, starch, and veg" meal where everything is prepared separately.

But what if you're having a sandwich or a meal that mixes different foods together, like a salad, pasta dish, stew, or stir-fry? That's when you need to use the principles behind the plate as a guide instead of copying it exactly.

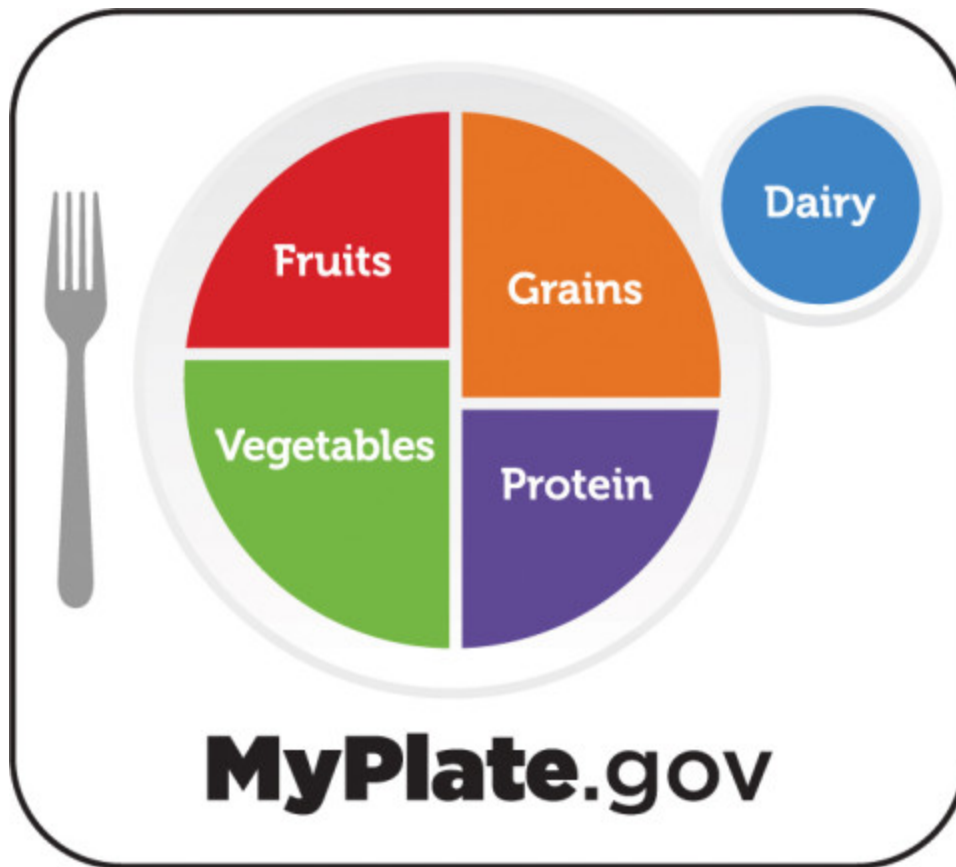
For a sandwich, let MyPlate guide you on what to choose. A healthy sandwich might start with two slices of whole-wheat bread — your grains. Add a slice of meat, cheese, or other protein. Then fill the sandwich with vegetables like lettuce, tomato, or grated carrots. Add a side of fruit and a cup of low-fat white milk and you've got your balanced meal.

For one-dish meals (or salads), make sure that half of what you're eating are vegetables and fruits, about a quarter is lean protein, and a quarter is grain, preferably whole grain. For example, a spaghetti dish could be whole-wheat pasta with a meatball, tossed with chopped tomato along with other veggies, like spinach or carrots. A stir-fry might be mixed veggies with tofu or chicken and brown rice. Avoid or limit high-fat sauces (like cream sauces) in one-dish meals and don't add too much dressing to salads.

MyPlate is only a guide. Not every meal you eat will have every food group, but try to include three or more. Take breakfast, for example: If you have a whole-wheat bagel with cream cheese for breakfast, add some fruit and maybe a glass of milk. You can make up any missing food groups, like veggies, later in the day.

More Tips on Eating Right

The USDA's MyPlate website offers lots of healthy living guidelines. Visit to get personalized recommendations about which foods to eat and how much.



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Vitamins and Minerals

You know vitamins and minerals are good for you. But what does your body really need? And is it possible to get too much of a good thing?

What Are Vitamins and Minerals?

Your body needs vitamins and minerals to work properly. You get them from the foods you eat every day.

Vitamins fall into two categories: fat soluble and water soluble (pronounced: SAHL-yuh-bul):

- The **fat-soluble vitamins** — A, D, E, and K — dissolve in fat and are stored in your body.
- The **water-soluble vitamins** — C and the B-complex vitamins (such as vitamins B6, B12, niacin, riboflavin, and folate) — dissolve in water. Your body can't store these vitamins. Any B or C vitamins that your body doesn't use travels through the bloodstream and is lost (mostly when you pee). So you need a fresh supply of these vitamins every day.

Vitamins are organic substances, which means they're made by plants or animals. Minerals are inorganic elements that come from soil and water, and are absorbed by plants or eaten by animals. Your body needs larger amounts of some minerals, such as calcium, to grow and stay healthy. Other minerals like chromium, copper, iodine, iron, selenium, and zinc are called **trace minerals** because you need only very small amounts of them.

What Do Vitamins and Minerals Do?

Vitamins and minerals boost the immune system, support normal growth and development, and help cells and organs do their jobs. For example, you've probably heard that carrots are good for your eyes. It's true! Carrots are full of substances called **carotenoids** (pronounced: kuh-RAH-teh-noydz) that your body converts into vitamin A, which helps prevent eye problems.

Vitamin K helps blood to clot, so cuts and scrapes stop bleeding quickly. You'll find vitamin K in green leafy vegetables, broccoli, and soybeans. And to have strong bones, you need to eat foods such as milk, yogurt, and green leafy vegetables, which are rich in the mineral calcium.

How Do I Get the Vitamins and Minerals I Need?

Eating well now is especially important because the body needs a variety of vitamins and minerals to grow and stay healthy.

Eating a mix of foods is the best way to get all the vitamins and minerals you need each day. Fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, lean meats, fish, and poultry are the best choices for getting the nutrients your body needs.

When deciding what to eat, check food labels and pick items that are high in vitamins and minerals. For example, when choosing drinks, you'll find that a glass of milk is a good source of vitamin D, calcium, phosphorous, and potassium. A glass of soda, on the other hand, doesn't have any vitamins or minerals.

You can also satisfy your taste buds without sacrificing nutrition while dining out: vegetable pizzas or fajitas, sandwiches with lean cuts of meat, fresh salads, and baked potatoes are just a few delicious, nutritious choices.

If you're a vegetarian, you'll need to plan carefully for a diet that includes the vitamins and minerals you need. The best sources for the minerals zinc and iron are meats, fish, and poultry. But you can get these from dried beans, seeds, nuts, and leafy green vegetables like kale.

Vitamin B12 is important for making red blood cells and keeping nerves working well. It is found only in animal products. If you don't eat meat, you can get vitamin B12 from eggs, milk and other dairy foods, and fortified breakfast cereals. Vegans (vegetarians who eat no animal products at all, including dairy products) may need to take vitamin B12 supplements.

Should I Take a Supplement?

Lots of people wonder if they should take vitamin or mineral supplements. If your diet includes a wide variety of foods — including whole-grain products, fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, nuts, seeds, eggs, and meats — you probably get the vitamins and minerals your body needs.

There are many supplements on the market, and of course their makers want you to buy them. Beware of unproven claims about the benefits of taking more than recommended amounts of any vitamin or mineral. Healthy teens usually don't need supplements if they eat a well-rounded diet.

Check with your doctor before taking vitamin or mineral supplements. Just because something is good for you doesn't mean that more is better. Some vitamins and minerals can cause health problems if you get too much of them.

Talk to your doctor or a dietitian if you're skipping meals, dieting, are a picky eater, or have any concerns about your diet. They can answer your questions and help you create a healthy eating plan that includes the nutrients your body needs.

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Why Exercise Is Wise

You've probably heard countless times how exercise is "good for you." But did you know that it can help you feel good too? Getting the right amount of exercise can rev up your energy levels and even help improve your mood.

What Are Some Benefits of Exercise?

Experts recommend that teens get 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. Here are some reasons why:

- **Exercise benefits every part of the body, including the mind.** Exercise improves brain health and learning. It can help people sleep better. When you exercise, your body makes chemicals that help you feel good. Exercise lowers your chances of depression and decreases feelings of anxiety. Plus, exercise can give you a real sense of accomplishment and pride at having achieved a goal — like mastering a new dance routine or beating an old time in the 100-meter dash.
- **Exercise helps people keep a healthy weight and lower their risk of some diseases.** Exercising regularly can help prevent weight gain, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. Bone-strengthening exercise — like jumping, running, or lifting weights — can help keep bones strong.
- **Exercise can help a person age well.** This may not seem important now, but your body will thank you later. Regular exercise improves quality of life — the ability to enjoy things — as you get older. It can improve brain health and reduce the chance of getting Alzheimer's (a brain disease that causes memory loss). Exercising can help prevent falls and injuries from falls.

Three parts of a balanced exercise routine include: aerobic exercise, strength training, and flexibility activities.

How Can I Get Aerobic Exercise?

Like other muscles, the heart enjoys a good workout. Aerobic exercise is any type of exercise that gets the heart pumping and gets you breathing harder. When you give your heart and lungs this kind of workout regularly, they get stronger and are better at getting oxygen (in the form of oxygen-carrying blood cells) to all parts of your body.

If you play team sports, you're probably getting at least 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous activity on practice days. Some team sports that give you a great aerobic workout are basketball, soccer, lacrosse, hockey, and rowing.

But if you don't play team sports, don't worry — there are plenty of ways to get aerobic exercise. These include biking, running, swimming, dancing, in-line skating, tennis, cross-country skiing, hiking, and walking quickly.

What About Strength Training?

The heart isn't the only muscle to benefit from regular exercise. The other muscles in your body enjoy exercise too. When you use your muscles, they become stronger.

Strong muscles are also a plus because they support your joints and help prevent injuries. Muscle-strengthening activities can also be bone-strengthening.

You don't have to lift weights to make your muscles and bones stronger. Different types of exercise strengthen different muscle groups. For example:

- For arms, try rowing or cross-country skiing. Pull-ups and push-ups, those old gym class standbys, are also good for building arm muscles.
- For strong legs, try running, biking, rowing, or skating. Squats and leg raises also work the legs.
- For abdominal and core strength, you can't beat rowing, yoga or pilates, and planks and crunches.

How Can I Build Flexibility?

Strengthening the heart, muscles, and bones isn't the only important goal of exercise. Exercise can also help the body stay flexible, meaning that your muscles and joints stretch and bend easily.

Being flexible may also help improve a person's sports performance. Some activities, like dance or martial arts, require great flexibility. But increased flexibility also can help people perform better at other sports, such as soccer or lacrosse.

Sports and activities that encourage flexibility are easy to find. Martial arts like karate, ballet, gymnastics, and yoga are good choices. Stretching after your workout will also help you improve your flexibility.

How Can I Keep It Going?

One of the biggest reasons people drop an exercise program is lack of interest: If what you're doing isn't fun, it's hard to keep it up. But there are many different sports and activities to try to see which one inspires you. If you need a little more motivation, take a class, join a team, or find an exercise buddy to help keep you on track.

Talk to someone, like a coach or fitness expert at a gym, who can help you get started on a program that's right for you and your level of fitness.

Everyone can benefit from moving more and sitting less, even those with disabilities or medical problems like asthma. If you have a health problem or other concern (like being out of shape), talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise plan.

Considering all the health benefits of being physically active, it's easy to see why exercise is wise. And the great thing about exercise is that it's never too late to start. Even small things can count as exercise — like taking a short bike ride, walking the dog, or raking leaves. If you are new to exercise, start with a few minutes a day and slowly build to the recommended amount of at least 60 minutes.

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Body Image and Self-Esteem

Do you ever wish you could change something about your body? If so, you're not alone. Lots of people feel unhappy with some part of their looks. But when you get stuck on what you don't like, it can really bring down your self-esteem.

You don't need a perfect body to have a good body image. When you like your body as it is, right now, you boost your body image. And your self-esteem too.

What Does Body Image Mean?

Your body image is the way you think about your body. This includes your thoughts and feelings about it. These can be good or bad and can change from time to time.

How Can I Accept the Way I Look?

Some people think they need to get in better shape to have a good body image. They think, "When I get in better shape, I'll like my body." But it's best to start the other way around. Accept yourself first. Here are ways to do that:

- **Realize that nobody's perfect.** Everyone has "flaws," even people with seemingly ideal figures. So see your body the way it is rather than the way you want it to be.
- **Don't body-shame yourself.** When you make harsh comments about your own body, it harms your self-esteem. That's true whether you say something out loud or think it to yourself. It can hurt as much as if someone else said it. So be kind and respectful to yourself. Ask, "Would I talk this way to my best friend?" Treat yourself like a good friend would.
- **Don't compare yourself with other people.** The saying goes "comparison is the thief of joy." Find things to like about your own body and be thankful for all the great things it can do.
- **Accept compliments.** When someone gives you a compliment, say "thank you" instead of not believing what's being said.

How Can I Like My Body?

When you accept your body, it's possible to learn to love (or at least like) what you have. Here's how:

- **Find things to like about your looks.** Every time you look in the mirror, find at least two things you like about yourself. Maybe your hair, face, or hands. What about your shape, shoulders, or legs? Your eyes or smile? Make a habit of telling yourself what you like and why. If you get stuck, ask someone who cares about you, like a good friend or trusted adult. Know that there's lots to like about you. Let yourself feel good.
- **Focus on what your body can do.** There's more to your body than your looks. When you play a sport, walk, run, dance, or swim — that's your body in action. Your body is there for you when you stretch, reach, climb, or jump for joy. It also allows you to carry and build things, and give someone a hug. Be amazed and thankful.

- **Be aware of your body.** Pay attention to your body as you go through the day. Enjoy the way it feels when you walk, run, and play. Listen to it when it needs food or rest. Things like yoga can help you observe your body more closely, teaching you to pay attention to how you breathe and move.

How Can I Take Care of My Body?

Taking good care of your body can make you feel better about it. Start caring for yourself with these tips:

- **Eat healthy foods.** Learn what foods are good for you and how much is the right amount. Take your time when you eat. Really taste your food and enjoy it. Eating right helps you look your best and boosts your body image. It also gives you the energy you need. When you treat your body right, you feel good about yourself.
- **Get good sleep.** Learn how much sleep you need for your age and get to bed on time. Turn off screens hours before bedtime so you can sleep well.
- **Be active every day.** Your body needs to move to be strong, fit, and healthy. Be active by playing a sport. You can also run, walk, work out, do yoga, or dance. Pick activities you like and have fun.
- **Keep a healthy weight.** Being at a healthy weight is good for you, and it helps you feel good about your body. Don't compare your weight with someone else's. Your doctor can tell you what you should weigh. If you're not at a healthy weight, don't try to change your diet on your own. Always talk with a parent or doctor first. Your doctor can suggest ways to reach and stay at a weight that's right for you.

What if I Need Help With My Body Image or Self-Esteem?

Sometimes, body image or self-esteem problems are too much to handle alone. Health issues, depression, or trauma can affect how you feel about yourself. And eating disorders can cause a poor body image that isn't true.

Tell a parent, doctor, or therapist what you're going through. Ask for help. Body image and self-esteem can get better with help and care.

Medically reviewed by: Beth C. Long, PsyD

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Note: All information on TeensHealth™ is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

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Therapy and Weight Management

When you're overweight, losing weight can feel like a challenge, no matter how much you want it. Sometimes it might seem like our minds are working against us, making up excuses and ways to get us off the hook.

How Our Minds Influence Weight Loss

Why is it so hard to stick with a healthy eating or exercise plan? Why do we slip up or go back to our old ways? A lot of it has to do with the habits we've developed over time.

We humans are creatures of habit. We tend to get settled into established, fixed ways of doing or thinking about things. Old habits can be hard to break. **Because losing weight can mean changing quite a few habits at once, it can take more than just willpower to stick with a weight-loss plan.**

Here's an example of a situation you've probably been in: You're out with friends. Everyone's eating pizza. Before you sat down at the table, you were feeling motivated to stick to your healthy eating plan. You knew your goals, and you planned to have one small slice of pizza and fill up on a healthy salad.

But as your best friend reaches for her third slice of pizza, you suddenly find yourself thinking something like, "I LOVE pizza! All my friends are eating it — and they're thin. It's not fair if I have to eat salad while they eat pizza. Maybe I'll just have that salad tomorrow."

Thoughts like these are powerful, and they quickly replace all your good intentions. Old habits can be strong. In fact, just seeing or hearing the word "pizza" probably gets you thinking about that food!

You can see how easy it is to give in. We've all been there. But after you've had the pizza, the guilt and regret set in. You might feel mad at yourself or self-critical. You may think, "Oh, I should have had the salad. Now I feel stuffed and my jeans feel tight." You might feel discouraged and tell yourself things like, "I can't stick to my plan." Or, "I'll never slim down. This is too hard."

It's like your mind is working against you.

This is where counselors (like psychologists or weight-management social workers) can help. They are trained to understand how people feel, think, act, and relate. **Weight-management counselors are there to help us deal with things like cravings or overeating. They can help us develop new habits — and new ways to think — that allow us to change.**

Changing Old Habits Can Be Hard

Trimming down to a healthier weight involves making changes in eating habits — and in thinking habits. For example, if you're working to lose weight, you may need to:

- Deal with cravings, urges to overeat, eating too fast, or mindless snacking.
- Create new habits about food choices, portions, or when and where to eat.

- Pay more attention when you're eating, so that you're getting full enjoyment and satisfaction from the healthy foods you eat.
- Develop new thinking habits that encourage rather than defeat you.
- Adjust your routine to fit in exercise time.

So many changes — so many opportunities to talk yourself out of your plan!

Ways Counseling Helps You Stay on Track

Weight-management therapists and counselors can help people bridge the gap between struggling and success. They can:

- **Help you put knowledge about weight management into practice.** You know what you *should* be doing to manage your weight, but it can be hard to actually *do* it. Weight-management experts can help you use all the new information you're learning to create a specific plan on what to do, one that's realistic for you.
- **Help you find and build strong, positive motivation.** It's not enough to have a plan. You need to build an inner motivation to put it into practice — to find the tools that let you sweep all the old habits out of your mind and replace them with new, healthy habits.
- **Help you identify the blocks and obstacles you face.** Weight-management counseling can help you recognize the things that make it difficult to stick to your plan and figure out how to work out, or work around, these barriers.
- **Help you identify emotions that can trigger overeating or emotional eating and deal with them in healthy ways.** The emotions surrounding eating can be complicated. Some emotions can act as motivators or barriers. Therapists can help people sort through the bad (like emotions that trigger overeating) and the good (like positive emotions that help motivate you).
- **Help you identify the pitfalls in thinking that can ruin your plan.** When you know which things get in the way of your success (like eating pizza when you're out with friends), you can learn to outsmart them.
- **Help you learn self-management skills.** Some people need to strengthen the skills that make it possible to stay on track and follow through on a plan.
- **Help you adopt positive eating habits.** A therapist can help you work to reset old eating habits so you can succeed with a weight-management plan.
- **Help you improve body image and self-image.** Feeling good about yourself can help you stick to your plan.
- **Help you work out other problems that may distract you from putting a weight-management plan into action.** Life problems (like issues with school) that don't get worked out can suck up time and energy that you need for your weight-management plan.

Everyone's different, so each person's plan for weight management will be tailored to fit him or her. That's another useful thing about working with a psychologist or counselor. These professionals understand your unique needs. They're not trying to fit you into a generic plan. Psychologists and other therapy professionals are great resources to help support you on your way to a healthier you!

Medically reviewed by: Mary L. Gavin, MD

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