

tool kit for teen care

Physical Activity



What is a good amount of exercise?

- The National Institutes of Health recommend 30 minutes of exercise on most, if not all, days of the week for both children and adults.
- Aerobic exercise is continuous activity in which breathing becomes faster and the heart rate increases. This increases fitness and makes the heart and lungs work better.
- Life exercise is 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.

What are the benefits of exercise?

- Adolescents who exercise frequently handle stress better than those who exercise infrequently.
- Regular exercise decreases anxiety and depression and increases self-esteem.
- Regular aerobic exercise helps decrease the risk for chronic diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, in girls with a family history of these conditions.
- Regular exercise helps the body fight infection and chronic illness.

Why don't teens exercise?

- From 1991 to 1997, the percentage of teens participating in vigorous physical activity decreased and schools decreased the number of daily physical education classes.
- Many teens watch television or do other motionless activities during their free time.
- Many believe that aerobic activity is not fun.
- Time constraints are a common problem for female teens.
- Use of alcohol or drugs and having a girlfriend are related to male teens not exercising.

- Some adolescents do not live in environments where it is safe to exercise or where it is common to exercise.
- Adolescents from poor families are more inactive and more likely to be obese.

How can teens stay fit?

- A teen can exercise for at least 30 minutes at least 3 days a week doing an exercise that can become a part of his or her life.
- Schools can teach teens about physical activity in required health education classes.
- A teen can participate in a team or individual sport.
- A teen should not exercise too much or too little because it will have a bad effect on bone strength.
- Physical education classes should not be the teen's only activity.
- A teen should make exercise a part of his or her daily routine as early as possible. Those who are active by age 16 years are less likely to be inactive in adulthood.
- Increase the amount of regular activity done each day:
 - Climb stairs instead of taking the elevator
 - Park far away from stores to increase the amount of time spent walking

What are some exercises that teens can do?

- Some good life exercises include:
 - Walking
 - Bicycling
 - Swimming
- Some good aerobic exercises include:
 - Basketball
 - Soccer
 - Aerobics class
 - Skating
 - Jogging





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How can exercising be kept safe?

- Heavy weight lifting is not recommended for developing teens. A teen should avoid it until fully physically developed (age 15–18 years). Children between the ages of 10 and 12 years can begin to train against their own body weight.
- Active team sports should be played with teens of similar age and physical ability.
- Teens should avoid the pressure to “win at all costs,” which is taught by many coaches.
- Wear the correct gear for protection and comfort according to the sport.
 - A helmet should be worn when bicycling.
 - Pads and helmet should be worn when in-line skating and using scooters.
 - Mouth guards should be worn for contact sports.
 - Shoes with ankle support should be used by teens who are in sports with a lot of running.
 - Female runners should use bras with good breast support. The bra should keep the breasts from actively moving while running.

What happens if a teen exercises too much?

- Extreme athletes may not eat or drink enough calcium to protect bone mass and to prevent fractures.
- If an athlete also is trying to decrease her body mass (such as a marathon runner) then other minerals in her body, besides calcium, also may be decreased.

- Females who are intensive athletes are more likely to have low amounts of iron in their bodies.
- Many competitive female athletes have eating disorders, amenorrhea (missed periods), and osteoporosis (weak bones). (See “Weight and Adolescent Females” Fact Sheet.)
- Signs that a person is exercising too much include:
 - Swelling of joints
 - Weight loss
 - Excessive fatigue
 - Repetitive injury
 - Obsession with exercise
 - Menstrual problems
 - Being significantly upset when unable to exercise
- Each of these problems could have medical consequences and should be discussed with a health care practitioner.

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 does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

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