

# Healthy Weight Loss For Teens

**Health & Fitness  
Lifestyle For Teens**



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# Introduction

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, there has been a dramatic increase in obesity in Americans since the 1990s.

Almost 9 million (15%) children between the ages of 6 and 19 are overweight, and this number is still growing, according to information gathered between 1999 and 2000 (triple the number since 1980). The information has also shown that another 15% of children between the ages of 6 and 19 are at risk of becoming overweight.

Obesity is defined as having an excessive accumulation of body fat which will result in the person's body being about 20% heavier than their ideal body weight.

Although teens may have fewer weight related health issues than adults, if they're already overweight, they are more likely to be an overweight or obese adult. Teens who are overweight (in fact people of all ages that are overweight) are at risk from a number of health issues:

1. Heart Disease
2. Diabetes
3. High Blood Pressure
4. Stroke
5. Cancer

Those teens who are obese may find that they are physically unfit, have a low self esteem, and general unhealthy well being. Many obese people will also tend to have a shorter life expectancy than those who are the right weight for their body size. Plus, it can also lead to social disabilities and unhappiness, which in turn may cause them stress and in some cases, may make them mentally ill.

A study in May 2004 suggested that overweight children are more likely to be involved in bullying than those children who are a normal weight. But they can not only be the victims of bullying, they may be the perpetrators as well.

The development of their own personal identity and body image is an important goal for any teenager.

There are a number of causes for obesity which center around an imbalance in the teens energy they put into their bodies, (calories that they obtain from the food they eat) and the energy they release from their bodies (how good their metabolism is, and how much physical activity they take part in). Often when a teen is overweight, there is a problem with the nutritional value of their diet. It could also be a result of psychological, familial or physiological issues.

## **The Family**

Often children and teens are more at risk of becoming overweight if they have two overweight parents. This may be a genetic factor, or they may be modeling themselves after what they see their parents eating. Also, if they take part in any physical activities, this can indirectly affect the teen.

## **Inactivity**

On average, an American child will spend several hours each day watching television or on a computer. Compare this to years ago, when this time would have been spent doing some form of physical activity. There are a large amount of teens and children who are now overweight, as they are expending very little energy, and often eat high calorie snacks while watching TV or playing on the computer. Today in the US, about 1/3 of elementary school children carry out some form of physical education, and less than 1/5 take part in physical activity programs after school.

## **Heredity**

Recently, information has shown that heredity can influence fatness in a child and teen. It was found that children with overweight mothers have been found to be less active, and often gain more weight than those children born to mothers who are a normal weight.

In this book, we will look at various ways to help overweight teens lose weight successfully, without resorting to fad diets etc.

## **Psychological Issues**

For many overweight teens, their physical health and well being are the least of their problems. The main issue is the teasing and abuse they receive from their peers at school. For many, it is not only what others think of them that is upsetting, but it's what they think of themselves. A good percentage of teenagers (especially girls) are clinically depressed, because they are so preoccupied with their weight.

A recent survey reveals that overweight teens rate their quality of life as low as that of young cancer patients who are having chemotherapy. Other studies report increased rates of depression, low self esteem and isolation from other members of their age group, which can result in behavioral problems. These teenagers are less likely to be accepted into higher education (college) or to get married, and are more likely to be part of lower socioeconomic groups.

Many overweight teens will be hard on themselves, and will often be mistreated by others. A study carried out in 2001 by Latner and Stunkard found that this situation, has steadily gotten worse.

Often, teens who are overweight can suffer from other problems such as cardiovascular, orthopedic, gastrointestinal, respiratory, hormonal, neurological and metabolic diseases (diabetes). These can often manifest themselves through psychological problems.

Today in the US, there are some weight loss programs for kids that combine psychological therapy with behavior modification therapy to improve the teens self esteem as well as their physical health.

## **Parenting Your Overweight Teen and Improving Their Self Esteem**

Teaching teens the importance of proper eating habits, nutrition, and physical activity is the first step in addressing the overweight problem.

By helping them become more selective with the types of food that they consume, and increasing the amount of physical activity that they accomplish, it will only produce positive results.

However, it should be stressed that formal dieting, especially giving your child a severely restricted diet, should only be attempted with medical approval and the appropriate nutritional supervision. Many pediatricians believe the best course is to hold an overweight child's weight at a steady level, and avoid losing large amounts of weight at a time. When their height is at a healthier proportion to their weight, then a dietary regime may be started.

The following 4 steps will help to facilitate healthier eating habits, and increase the amount of physical activity your teen does.

### **1. Assessing the Health of Your Child**

Before you make any personal or environmental changes in your teen's life, take a few minutes to survey what your home life is like. Do you allow them to lead a sedentary lifestyle? Are they given plenty of chances to over eat at any time? If they are, it's important that you introduce changes in to these areas of their life gradually.

First, look at just how many hours your teen spends either watching TV, or sitting at their computer. A teen can spend up to 24 hours a week watching TV. Log any time that they spend doing either, watching TV or on the computer, and try to reduce this by half.

When you have meals, does your family gather around a table, or do you eat most of your meals sitting in front of the TV or computer? Make it a family rule that, all food (including snacks) will be eaten in the kitchen or in the dining room at a table. This one small change has been shown to significantly reduce the amount of over eating that takes place at home.

Next, you will need to take a close look at your fridge and pantry. Which foods do you have that you are most likely to eat when hunger hits? If the foods are high in fat, sweetened or low in nutritional value, then find healthier alternatives, such as fresh fruit and vegetables.

### **2. Do Not Shame your Child into Losing Weight**

Neither adults nor children can be shamed into losing weight, and an overweight teen will know that they weigh too much. What a teen doesn't know, is how they can achieve a normal weight, as well as increase their self esteem. Teens like to know that their parents love them unconditionally, whether they are fat, thin or normal.

For any parent, mastering the fine art of loving your child just the way they are, while helping them to achieve a healthier body can be difficult. Any parent must learn to “give time” and believe that the lessons we teach, will one day come to fruition.

This means we can teach our youngsters to visualize a healthy meal, one that is half salad or vegetables, a quarter starches and the remainder protein such as fish, meat, poultry or soy. But you also know that at some point, they will sneak either sweets or cookies, and upset the balance that you have achieved.

A parent can persist in teaching their teens to see their plate before any food is put on it. This is helpful, as it creates a sense of portion control that is helpful when the parent is not around. This portion control can also be practiced when visiting a restaurant as well.

### **3. Physical Activity as a Family**

Physical activity should be practiced several times a week. The recommended amount of physical activity for an adult is 30 minutes. For children it's 60 minutes. However, if you are trying to lose weight, more physical activity may be necessary.

A great way of breaking the pattern is to arrange activities that involve plenty of movement for the whole family. These types of activities burn calories, and serve as a setting for parent and child communication. It is especially important in a teen's life, since opportunities to interact with your teen are at a premium.

There is little or no financial cost involved in going for a walk or a bike ride. Many communities now have swimming pools which do not cost too much to use. Just taking the family dog for a walk in the evening will help to increase the family's metabolism.

### **4. How to encourage the right sort of behavior in your teen**

The best way to help an overweight or obese teen is through your own behavior. Too often, teens will do as an adult does, rather than what we tell them.

No parent can ask their child to turn off the TV when they are watching it in another room, or to stop using the computer when they are spending hours themselves surfing the net. Nor should they restrict the portions of food they eat, when they do not watch what they are eating. Why would any child want to drink water or munch on fruit or vegetables, when they see the adults around them drinking sugar laden soda or having a bag of potato chips?

When looking to lead a healthier life style, it should be done one day at a time, and the end result will be well worth the effort.

### **Advice for Helping Teens Lose Weight**

Losing weight as a teen is far different from losing weight as an adult. Weight loss in a teen depends on their age, the metabolic rate, their eating habits, and the type of lifestyle they lead.

For many teens, losing weight is easier than it is for an adult. The teenage body burns calories much easier and quicker. Often, teens lead a much more active lifestyle; they enjoy doing exercise, walking, jogging or participating in some form of sports. These types of exercises will help boost a teen's metabolism, and increase the amount of calories they burn.

Teens could start with one of the many fad diets that are available, but they should only use these for about a week. Anything longer can cause damage to their bodies. After a week of using a fad diet, they should continue on a much more healthy diet regime, one that allows them to lose weight more slowly, which is the best way to lose weight healthily.

When on a diet, a teen should also lead a more active lifestyle. They can do this by exercising whenever possible, or participating in some sporting activity. This is especially important for teenagers, as they are still growing, and they need more food. They need to exercise in order to help remove some of the extra calories they are gaining from the extra food they are eating. So, get out and exercise. If they sit around at home watching TV or playing on the computer, they will soon find that their weight has increased.

As a teenager, you have much more energy, so put it to good use by exercising or becoming involved in sports. The best benefit is they are exercising their bodies and burning off the excess fat and calories which improves their health.

It is imperative, therefore, for those teens to lead both an active life, and have a healthy diet, in order to achieve maximum performance and productivity. Many teens who lead healthy lifestyles, find they are able to do everything they want, and do not suffer from fatigue or weakness.

## **Simple Rules For Safe Weight Loss**

Although there is no magic formula to helping your teen lose weight, the real key to succeeding is by helping them to lead a healthier lifestyle that they can carry on into adulthood.

### **1. Talk to your Teen**

If your teen is overweight, they are probably concerned about it too. Aside from long term health issues, such as high blood pressure or diabetes, there are also the social and emotional issues involved as well.

Offer your teen the support and gentle understanding that they are looking for, and help them to take control of the problem.

### **2. Unrealistic Images**

For many teenage girls, their weight and how they look can be a very delicate matter. You should remind them there is no perfect body. Remind them that the right weight for one person, is not necessarily the right weight for somebody else.

Instead of talking to them about fat or thin, encourage your teenage to focus on behaviors which will promote a much healthier weight. If you want to, talk to your family doctor, and he will help to set realistic goals for your teenager with regards to body mass index, and the weight they should be, based on their age, height and general health.

### **3. Resist Using Quick Fixes to lose weight rapidly**

Help your teenager by teaching them how to lose weight, and then keep it off. Many of the fad diets around are likely to rob your teen of essential nutrients, iron and calcium that they need in their diet, as they are still growing.

Don't allow them to take weight loss pills or other quick fixes, as they will not address the root of the problem. The effects of these types of treatment are short lived anyway.

It is important to remember that only permanent changes in their habits will help them keep the weight off.

### **4. Increase the amount of physical activity**

Like any adult, a teenager will need to do about 60 minutes of physical activity, several times a week, preferably daily. But this does not mean that they have to do it all at once. They can do the activity in short bursts throughout the day in order to help burn off excess calories or fat.

Team sports, which they do at school or at a local sports hall, are a great way for your teen to get active. However, if your child isn't an athlete, or finds it difficult to participate in certain sports, encourage them to walk, cycle or skate to and from school, or just to walk a few times around the school before they begin classes. They could spend at least one day away from the computer and do something a little more physical like taking the dog for a walk, or just going for a walk themselves.

Get them to do some household chores, like vacuuming or washing the car. Most housework has aerobic benefits.

### **5. Ensure that your teen has breakfast**

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. A good nutritious breakfast will help jump start your teen's day and their metabolism. It provides them with the energy they need to face the day ahead. You may also find that it stops them from eating too much during the rest of the day as well.

If your teen is not keen on high fiber cereal or whole wheat toast, suggest they eat what was left over from the night before. You could even suggest a piece of cheese, a small handful of nuts and a piece of fruit.

### **6. Snack wisely**

It may be difficult for your teenage child to make healthy choices when they are at school. Encourage them to replace a bag of chips with a much healthier option from home, such as



frozen grapes, an orange, strawberries sliced red, orange or yellow peppers, a few cherry tomatoes or baby carrots.

## **7. Watch the Size of the food portions**

When it comes to the portions that a teen eats, size really does matter. If you encourage your child to cut back and stop eating when they feel full, they'll have a much easier time getting their weight under control. You may find that just one slice of pizza, or half the pasta is enough to make them feel full.

## **8. Drinks**

An average 12 ounce can of soda has 150 calories and 10 teaspoons of sugar. The calories and sugar that you find in fruit juice, specialty coffees and other drinks can also add up quickly. So getting your teenager to drink more water, instead of soda and other sugary drinks, will save on the calories and their sugar intake. Suggest they drink flavored water, seltzer water or unsalted club soda instead.

## **9. Let them have the occasional treat**

Allowing your teen to have a late night pizza at a friend's, or some nachos when they're at the movies, doesn't derail your teen's healthy eating plan.

Suggest that when they are out, they have a breadstick with sauce instead of garlic bread, or they share a snack with their friend, instead of having an order themselves.

It is important that you let your teenager know that they are in control, and the occasional treat is okay. The most important thing is getting them to lead a healthier lifestyle.

## **10. Family involvement**

Rather than just singling out your teenager to lead a healthier lifestyle, adopt these healthy habits for the whole family.

- a. Encourage the whole family to eat more fresh fruit, vegetables and whole grains. It's important that you set a good example for all your children.
- b. Forget the junk food. Although healthy food often costs more, it is a good investment in your child's life.
- c. Try out new recipes or healthier alternatives to those family favorites.
- d. Don't allow anyone to eat while sitting on the couch. This will curb mindless eating.
- e. Arrange some family activities, such as walks in the evening, or visiting a local recreation center on the weekend.

## **11. Be Positive in your Attitude when helping your teen to lose weight**

Being overweight does not always lead to a lifetime of low self esteem, but your acceptance of your teen's weight problem is critical. Remember to listen to your teen's concerns regarding their weight, and comment on their skills, efforts and accomplishments.

Make it perfectly clear that your love for them is unconditional, and not dependent on how they look. Help your teen learn to express their feelings in much healthier ways, say by writing down what they feel in a journal.

If your child is struggling with low self esteem, and finding it difficult to cope with their weight in a healthy way, then consider looking for a support group, formal weight control program or professional counseling to help them.

There are many support groups which will provide your teen with the tools to counter any social pressure and cultivate a positive attitude. This will help them to take control of their weight. These benefits will then last them a life time.

### **When the pendulum swings too far**

In some cases, an overweight teen becomes obsessed with losing weight and pushes the pendulum to the other end of the scale. The opposite side of obesity is anorexia and bulimia, which are more dangerous.

It is very difficult to understand how anorexia and bulimia affects people who may look healthy and a normal size weight. For many sufferers, they see themselves as fat and undesirable, and they usually lack self confidence and self esteem. They may feel this because they have been laughed at when they were younger, or it can be that they are just too shy or embarrassed to discuss how they feel.

Those suffering from either anorexia or bulimia are at risk. Their health will be compromised if their eating problems are not diagnosed early. What you need to do is get to the root of their problem and discuss how they feel about themselves. Find out why they feel that they need to lose the weight in such a manner. Then you can look at ways in which you can help them to combat this problem.

People who are suffering from anorexia or bulimia will most likely need professional help. There are plenty of self help groups which assist with these eating disorders.

How do I recognize if my teen is suffering from an eating problem?

Unfortunately, most people, especially children, are good at hiding the symptoms related to eating problems. But here are some signs that should help.

1. The color of their skin. Does it have a healthy glow or is it dull and pale?
2. Eyes - are they bright or dull?
3. Hair – It is full and shiny or has it become dull, flat and thinning?

4. Legs and Arms – Have they got good tone, or do they look just like skin and bone?
5. Have their energy levels decreased?
6. Teenage Girls – Has their menstrual cycle altered in any way?

Discreetly watch your teen's bathroom habits. Are they constantly going to the bathroom after they have eaten in order to purge the food from their body? Do they have loose stools and stomach cramps because they are taking laxatives?

Teenagers who are suffering from anorexia will often play with the food, or say they are not hungry or that they ate earlier when they were out with their friends. Others may skip breakfast and just grab something on the way school, or they won't take their lunch to school. Discreetly check with the school to see if they are eating meals at school. Speak to their friends and find out what they are eating when they are with them. However, it is important that you do not pry too much, or it will lead to them only hiding the problem from you even more.

If you are able to, monitor what they are reading and logging onto on the internet.

If your teen losses a dramatic amount of weight in a short period of time, it could signal a larger issue. Weight gain is an issue, but critical weight loss is even more alarming.

## **Conclusion**

There are number of ways to help a teen to cope with their obesity, as well as helping them lose weight safely.

Often, obesity treatment programs which have been devised for teens rarely have weight loss as a goal, but rather they aim to slow or halt any weight gain so the teen will grow into their body weight over the next few months or years. It is estimated that for every 20% excess body weight a teen has, they will need about 1½ years weight maintenance to obtain their ideal body weight.

So, early and appropriate intervention on the part of the parent is particularly valuable. Modifying a teen's eating and exercise habits is much easier to do than with an adult.

The three forms of intervention that a parent could use are:

## **Physical Activity**

By adopting a formal exercise program, or just simply becoming more active, you help burn fat and increase the amount of energy a teen expends. Studies have shown that exercise, as well as one of the other form of intervention, is a successful way to help a teen lose weight safely.

## **Diet**

It is advisable that you do not allow your teen to fast or drastically reduce their calorie intake. Not only is this way of losing weight psychologically stressful on them, but it may adversely affect their growth. Make sure they have a balanced diet, with moderate restrictions on the amount of calories they consume.

Your teen may need to be educated on the nutritional values of foods so they are aware of what foods are most beneficial for them.

## **Modification of a Teens Behavior**

There are many behavioral strategies that are used on adults, which can be successfully applied to teens, such as:

1. Self monitoring and recording the food they eat
2. Increased physical activity
3. Slowing the rate at which they eat their food
4. Limiting the time and place they eat
5. Provide them with rewards and incentives

Hopefully you are inspired to help your teen with any weight issues they have. However, it is easier to prevent a teen from being overweight, than it is to treat it.

Where prevention is concerned, it focuses on educating the parents about providing their children with a good nutritional diet and plenty of physical activity. It's also important to help teens build their self esteem, and address any psychological issues that they have.