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Tips for Growing Healthy Teens

Healthy adolescents make healthier choices. The first step to a healthy future is having a healthy NOW. Busy families have many commitments and sometimes don't take the time they need to make the healthy choices they know they should. Research shows that adolescents that have a healthy lifestyle are less impulsive, less anxious, get better grades, have greater self-control and are more likely to make the healthy choices that will lead to a drug-free future. Adolescents who recognize the importance of physical health, are also more aware of the risks involved with drug or alcohol use.

Everyone wants to live a healthy life. No one would choose to be sick or tired or hungry or worn out. The health choices our children make now will affect their health in the future. The health habits that they form during middle school and high school will help to determine their health habits in adulthood. If our children develop a culture of health now, they can enjoy a lifetime of health and healthy choices.

Science tells us, that in order to maintain physical health, we need to focus on 3 significant health components: NUTRITION, EXERCISE and REST. Researchers find that young people make the best choices when they have a nutritious diet, get plenty of exercise and an adequate amount of sleep. This month's Parenting Power Tips help to examine the importance of those 3 components in our growing children's lives.



PARENTING POWER TIPS

NUTRITION– We've all seen the dietary guidelines outlined at ChooseMyPlate.gov. Doctors and scientist have done extensive research to determine the optimal number of servings each of us should have from each food group each day. Each food group offers essential nutrients that help our bodies to grow and develop in a healthy way. We need to make sure we are getting the nutrients from each of these groups to keep our bodies healthy and functioning well. The benefits to eating healthy foods in the right amounts include:

- ⇒ strengthened immune system
- ⇒ optimal brain development
- ⇒ improved school performance
- ⇒ increased energy
- ⇒ stronger body
- ⇒ heightened physical performance

EXERCISE– Some people love to exercise, others don't. Whether you like it or not, exercise is vital to our physical health and the health of our growing adolescent children. The Centers for Disease Control and the American Heart Association recommend that students age 11-18 get one hour of exercise each day. That does not have to be one continuous hour—it can be spread out throughout the day in lots of different ways. Exercise also releases important endorphins that help our children deal with stress and anxiety. There are so many benefits to incorporating exercise into the daily routine of our growing children:

- ⇒ strengthen muscles
- ⇒ improved body functions
- ⇒ increased energy
- ⇒ increased focus and attention
- ⇒ reduced stress

REST- Our children are busy people with very full schedules. Often, they work or play into the wee hours of the morning. Unfortunately, this causes them to cut short their sleep. Sleep is one of the most important components of health for our growing adolescents. We have all seen our children when they are overtired—it's not pretty! No one reaches their optimal performance when they are tired. Doctors recommend 8-10 hours of sleep each night for 10-17 year olds. It seems like a lot, but their bodies and brains require restful sleep to grow to their full potential.

When adolescents get the recommended amount of sleep, they:

- ⇒ have more brain power
- ⇒ get better grades
- ⇒ make healthier choices
- ⇒ are less impulsive
- ⇒ maintain a healthier weight
- ⇒ have less anxiety and stress

How does your family measure up? Use this month's [PowerTalk—Family Health Strategies](#) to help review your family's health practices and develop strategies that will move you toward a healthier future.

Next Month: Emotional Awareness and Development in Adolescents