Take Charge of Your Health: A Guide for Teenagers

As you get older, you’re able to start making your own decisions about a lot of things that matter most to you. You may choose your own clothes, music, and friends. You also may be ready to make decisions about your body and health.

Making healthy decisions about what you eat and drink, how active you are, and how much sleep you get is a great place to start. Here you’ll learn

- **how your body works**—how your body uses the food and drinks you consume and how being active may help your body "burn" calories
- **how to choose healthy foods and drinks**
- **how to get moving** and stay active
- **how getting enough sleep** is important to staying healthy
- **how to ease into healthy habits** and keep them up
- **how to plan healthy meals and physical activities** that fit your lifestyle

Don’t forget to check out the "Did you know?" boxes for even more helpful tips and ideas.

**Did you know?**

About 20 percent of kids between 12 and 19 years old have obesity. But small changes in your eating and physical activity habits may help you reach and stay a healthy weight.

**How does the body use energy?**

Your body needs energy to function and grow. Calories from food and drinks give you that energy. Think of food as energy to charge up your battery for the day. Throughout the day, you use energy from the battery to think and move, so you need to eat and drink to stay powered up. Balancing the energy you take in through food and beverages with the energy you use for growth, activity, and daily living is called "energy balance." Energy balance may help you stay a healthy weight.
How many calories does your body need?

Different people need different amounts of calories to be active or stay a healthy weight. The number of calories you need depends on whether you are male or female, your genes, how old you are, your height and weight, whether you are still growing, and how active you are, which may not be the same every day.

How should you manage or control your weight?

Some teens try to lose weight by eating very little; cutting out whole groups of foods like foods with carbohydrates, or "carbs;" skipping meals; or fasting. These approaches to losing weight could be unhealthy because they may leave out important nutrients your body needs. In fact, unhealthy dieting could get in the way of trying to manage your weight because it may lead to a cycle of eating very little and then overeating because you get too hungry. Unhealthy dieting could also affect your mood and how you grow.

Smoking, making yourself vomit, or using diet pills or laxatives to lose weight may also lead to health problems. If you make yourself vomit, or use diet pills or laxatives to control your weight, you could have signs of a serious eating disorder and should talk with your health care professional or another trusted adult right away. If you smoke, which increases your risk of heart disease, cancer, and other health problems, quit smoking as soon as possible.

If you think you need to lose weight, talk with a health care professional first. A doctor or dietitian may be able to tell you if you need to lose weight and how to do so in a healthy way.
Choose Healthy Foods and Drinks

Healthy eating involves taking control of how much and what types of food you eat, as well as the beverages you drink. Try to replace foods high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat protein foods, and fat-free or low-fat dairy foods.

Fruits and Vegetables
Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables. Dark green, red, and orange vegetables have high levels of the nutrients you need, like vitamin C, calcium, and fiber. Adding tomato and spinach—or any other available greens that you like—to your sandwich is an easy way to get more veggies in your meal.

Grains
Choose whole grains like whole-wheat bread, brown rice, oatmeal, and whole-grain cereal, instead of refined-grain cereals, white bread, and white rice.

Protein
Power up with low fat or lean meats like turkey or chicken, and other protein-rich foods, such as seafood, egg whites, beans, nuts, and tofu.

Dairy
Build strong bones with fat-free or low-fat milk products. If you can’t digest lactose—the sugar in milk that can cause stomach pain or gas—choose lactose-free milk or soy milk with added calcium. Fat-free or low-fat yogurt is also a good source of dairy food.

Healthy Eating Tips

- Try to limit foods like cookies, candy, frozen desserts, chips, and fries, which often have a lot of sugar, unhealthy fat, and salt.
For a quick snack, try recharging with a pear, apple, or banana; a small bag of baby carrots; or hummus with sliced veggies.

Don’t add sugar to your food and drinks.

Drink fat-free or low-fat milk and avoid sugary drinks. Soda, energy drinks, sweet tea, and some juices have added sugars, a source of extra calories. The 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines call for getting less than 10 percent of your daily calories from added sugars.

Fats

Fat is an important part of your diet. Fat helps your body grow and develop, and may even keep your skin and hair healthy. But fats have more calories per gram than protein or carbs, and some are not healthy.

Some fats, such as oils that come from plants and are liquid at room temperature, are better for you than other fats. Foods that contain healthy oils include avocados, olives, nuts, seeds, and seafood such as salmon and tuna fish.

Solid fats such as butter, stick margarine, and lard, are solid at room temperature. These fats often contain saturated and trans fats, which are not healthy for you. Other foods with saturated fats include fatty meats, and cheese and other dairy products made from whole milk. Take it easy on foods like fried chicken, cheeseburgers, and fries, which often have a lot of saturated and trans fats. Options to consider include a turkey sandwich with mustard or a lean-meat, turkey, or veggie burger.

Your body needs a small amount of sodium, which is mostly found in salt. But getting too much sodium from your foods and drinks can raise your blood pressure, which is unhealthy for your heart and your body in general. Even though you’re a teen, it’s important to pay attention to your blood pressure and heart health now to prevent health problems as you get older.

Foods that contain healthy oils include avocados, olives, nuts, seeds, and seafood such as salmon and tuna fish.
Try to consume less than 2,300 mg, or no more than 1 teaspoon, of sodium a day. This amount includes the salt in already prepared food, as well as the salt you add when cooking or eating your food.

Processed foods, like those that are canned or packaged, often have more sodium than unprocessed foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables. When you can, choose fresh or frozen fruits and veggies over processed foods. Try adding herbs and spices instead of salt to season your food if you make your own meals. Remember to rinse canned vegetables with water to remove extra salt. If you use packaged foods, check the amount of sodium listed on the Nutrition Facts label. Figure 1 below shows an updated food label, which the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved for use on most packaged foods beginning in 2018.

Figure 1. Side-by-Side Comparison of Original and New Nutrition Facts Label
Limit added sugars

Some foods, like fruit, are naturally sweet. Other foods, like ice cream and baked desserts, as well as some beverages, have added sugars to make them taste sweet. These sugars add calories but not vitamins or fiber. Try to consume less than 10 percent of your daily calories from added sugars in food and beverages. Reach for an apple or banana instead of a candy bar.

Did you know?

Many teens need more of these nutrients:

- calcium, to build strong bones and teeth. Good sources of calcium are fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese.
- vitamin D, to keep bones healthy. Good sources of vitamin D include orange juice, whole oranges, tuna, and fat-free or low-fat milk.
- potassium, to help lower blood pressure. Try a banana, or baked potato with the skin, for a potassium boost.
- fiber, to help you stay regular and feel full. Good sources of fiber include beans and celery.
• protein, to power you up and help you grow strong. Peanut butter; eggs; tofu; legumes, such as lentils and peas; and chicken, fish, and low-fat meats are all good sources of protein.

• iron, to help you grow. Red meat contains a form of iron that your body absorbs best. Spinach, beans, peas, and iron-fortified cereals are also sources of iron. You can help your body absorb the iron from these foods better when you also eat foods with vitamin C, like an orange.

Control your food portions

A portion is how much food or beverage you choose to consume at one time, whether in a restaurant, from a package, at school or a friend’s, or at home. Many people consume larger portions than they need, especially when away from home. Ready-to-eat meals—from a restaurant, grocery store, or at school—may give you larger portions than your body needs to stay charged up. The Weight-control Information Network has tips to help you eat and drink a suitable amount of food and beverages for you, whether you are at home or somewhere else.

Did you know?

Just one super-sized, fast food meal may have more calories than you need in a whole day. And when people are served more food, they may eat or drink more—even if they don't need it. This habit may lead to weight gain. When consuming fast food, choose small portions or healthier options, like a veggie wrap or salad instead of fries or fried chicken.

Take the Portion Distortion Quiz to find out how portion sizes have changed over the years.

When eating fast food, choose healthier options.

Be media smart.
Advertisements, TV shows, the internet, and social media may affect your food and beverage choices and how you choose to spend your time. Many ads try to get you to consume high-fat foods and sugary drinks. Be aware of some of the tricks ads use to influence you:

- An ad may show a group of teens consuming a food or drink, or using a product to make you think all teens are or should be doing the same. The ad may even use phrases like “all teens need” or “all teens are.”
- Advertisers sometimes show famous people using or recommending a product because they think you will want to buy products that your favorite celebrities use.
- Ads often use cartoon figures to make a food, beverage, or activity look exciting and appealing to young people.

Don’t skip meals

 Skipping meals might seem like an easy way to lose weight, but it actually may lead to weight gain if you eat more later to make up for it. Even if you’re really busy with school and activities, it’s important to try not to skip meals. Follow these tips to keep your body charged up all day and to stay healthy:

- **Eat breakfast every day.** Breakfast helps your body get going. If you’re short on time in the morning, grab something to go, like an apple or banana.
- **Pack your lunch on school days.** Packing your lunch may help you control your food and beverage portions and increases the chances that you will eat it because you made it.
- **Eat dinner with your family.** When you eat home-cooked meals with your family, you are more likely to consume healthy foods. Having meals together also gives you a chance to reconnect with each other and share news about your day.
- **Get involved in grocery shopping and meal planning at home.** Going food shopping and planning and preparing meals with family members or friends can be fun. Not only can you choose a favorite grocery store, and healthy foods and recipes, you also have a chance to help others in your family eat healthy too.

Did you know?

[Image of two children eating breakfast]

Get Moving

Physical activity should be part of your daily life, whether you play sports, take physical education (PE) classes in school, do chores, or get around by biking or walking. Regular physical activity can help you manage your weight, have stronger muscles and bones, and be more flexible.

Aerobic versus Lifestyle Activities
You should be physically active for at least 60 minutes a day. Most of the 60 minutes or more of activity a day should be either moderate or intense aerobic physical activity, and you should include intense physical activity at least 3 days a week. Examples of aerobic physical activity, or activity that makes you breathe harder and speeds up your heart rate, include jogging, biking, and dancing.

Walk or bike around your neighborhood.

For a more moderate workout, try brisk walking, jogging, or biking on flat streets or paths. To pick up the intensity, turn your walk into a jog, or your jog into a run—or add hills to your walk, jog, or bike ride. You don't have to do your 60 minutes a day all at once to benefit from your activity.
Routine activities, such as cleaning your room or taking out the trash, may not get your heart rate up the way biking or jogging does. But they are also good ways to keep active on a regular basis.

Fitness apps that you can download onto your computer, smartphone, or other mobile device can help you keep track of how active you are each day.

**Did you know?**

Activities add up!

Here's an example of how to fit 60 minutes of physical activity into your day:

10 minutes – to walk or bike to a friend's house
+ 30 minutes – of playing basketball
+ 10 minutes – of chasing the dog around the yard
+ 10 minutes – to walk back home

= 60 minutes of activity!

**Have fun with your friends**
Being active can be more fun with other people, like friends or family members. You may also find that you make friends when you get active by joining a sports team or dance club. Mix things up by choosing a different activity each day. Try kickball, flashlight tag, or other activities that get you moving, like walking around the mall. Involve your friends and challenge them to be healthy with you. Sign up for active events together, like charity walks, fun runs, or scavenger hunts.

**What if I don't have money for sports equipment or activities?**

You don't need money or equipment to stay active. You can run or use free community facilities, like school tracks and basketball courts, to be active at least 60 minutes each day. If you want to play a sport or game that you need equipment for, check with your neighbors or friends at school to see if you can borrow or share supplies. Your school guidance counselor or a PE teacher or coach could tell you how much it costs to join a sports team you are interested in. They may know if your school waives or reduces fees, or if you could apply for a “scholarship” for certain activities.

**Take it outside**

Maybe you or some of your friends spend a lot of time indoors watching TV, surfing the web, using social media, or playing video games. Try getting in some outdoor activity to burn calories instead. Here are other activities to try:

- Have a jump rope or hula hoop contest.
- Play Frisbee.
- Build an obstacle course or have a scavenger hunt.
- Play volleyball or flag football.

If you’re stuck indoors or don’t have a lot of time, try climbing up and down the stairs in your apartment or home. You can also find dance and other fitness and exercise videos online or on some TV channels. Some routines are only 15 or 20 minutes so you can squeeze them in between homework, going out, or other activities. You also can choose active sports games if you have a gaming system.

**Tips for cutting back your screen time**

Try to limit your screen time to less than 2 hours each day, not counting your homework:

- Replace after-school TV and video-game time with physical activities at home, at school, or in your community.
- Turn off your cellphone or other device before you go to bed. Put them away from your nightstand or bed.
Get Enough Sleep

Sometimes it’s hard to get enough sleep, especially if you have a job, help take care of younger brothers or sisters, or are busy with other activities after school. Like healthy eating and getting enough physical activity, getting enough sleep is important for staying healthy.

You need enough sleep to do well in school, work and drive safely, and fight off infection. Not getting enough sleep may make you moody and irritable. While more research is needed, some studies have shown that not getting enough sleep may also contribute to weight gain.

If you’re between 13 and 18 years old, you should get 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night. Find out what you can do to make sure you get enough sleep.

Take Your Time

Changing your habits can be hard. And developing new habits takes time. Use the tips below and the checklist under “Be a health champion” to stay motivated and meet your goals. You can do it!

- **Make changes slowly.** Don’t expect to change your eating, drinking, or activity habits overnight. Changing too much too fast may hurt your chances of success.
- **Figure out what’s holding you back.** Are there unhealthy snack foods at home that are too tempting? Are the foods and drinks you’re choosing at your school cafeteria too high in fat and sugar? How can you change these habits?
- **Set a few realistic goals.** If you’re a soda drinker, try replacing a couple of sodas with water. Once you are drinking less soda for a while, try cutting out all soda. Then set another goal, like getting more physical activity each day. Once you have reached one goal, add another.
- **Get a buddy at school or someone at home to support your new habits.** Ask a friend, brother or sister, parent, or guardian to help you make changes and stick with your new habits.

Planning Healthy Meals and Physical Activities Just for You

Being healthy sounds like it could be a lot of work, right? Well, it doesn’t have to be. A free, online tool called the MyPlate Daily Checklist can help you create a daily food plan. All you have to do is type in whether you are male or female, your weight, height, and how much physical activity you get each day. The checklist will tell you how many daily calories you should take in and what amounts of fruit, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy you should eat to stay within your calorie target.

Another tool, called the SuperTracker, can help you plan, analyze, and track both your eating patterns and physical activity. With SuperTracker, you can find out what and how much to eat,
track your foods, physical activities and weight, and set personal goals.

With SuperTracker’s Food-A-Pedia, you can type in a food or beverage to find out how many calories it has, as well as how much sugar, saturated fat, and sodium. The tool has nutrition information for more than 8,000 foods. You can use Food-A-Pedia to plan meals like the ones below. For easy and healthy recipe ideas, visit BAM! Body and Mind.

**Breakfast:** a banana, a slice of whole-grain bread with avocado or tomato, and fat-free or low-fat milk

**Lunch:** a turkey sandwich with dark leafy lettuce, tomato, and red peppers on whole-wheat bread

**Dinner:** two whole-grain taco shells with chicken or black beans, fat-free or low-fat cheese, and romaine lettuce

**Snack:** an apple, banana, or air-popped popcorn

**Be a health champion**

Spending much of your day away from home can sometimes make it hard to consume healthy foods and drinks. By becoming a “health champion,” you can help yourself and family members, as well as your friends, get healthier by consuming healthier foods and drinks and becoming more active. Use this checklist to work healthy habits into your day, whether you’re at home or on the go:

- Each night, pack a healthy lunch and snacks for the next day. Consume the lunch you packed. Try to avoid soda, chips, and candy from vending machines.

- Go to bed at a regular time every night to recharge your body and mind. Turn off your phone, TV, and other devices when you go to bed. Try to get between 8 and 10 hours of sleep each night.

- Eat a healthy breakfast.

- Walk or bike to school if you live nearby and can do so safely. Invite friends to join you.

- Between classes, stand up and walk around, even if your next subject is in the same room.

- Participate in gym classes instead of sitting on the sidelines.

- Get involved in choosing food and drinks at home. Help make dinner and share it with your family at the dinner table.

**Clinical Trials**
The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) and other components of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) conduct and support research into many diseases and conditions.

What are clinical trials, and are they right for you?

Clinical trials are part of clinical research and at the heart of all medical advances. Clinical trials look at new ways to prevent, detect, or treat disease. Researchers also use clinical trials to look at other aspects of care, such as improving the quality of life for people with chronic illnesses. Find out if clinical trials are right for you [NIH](https://www.clinicaltrials.gov).

What clinical trials are open?

Clinical trials that are currently open and are recruiting can be viewed at [www.ClinicalTrials.gov](https://www.clinicaltrials.gov).

December 2016

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The NIDDK would like to thank:

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