

Helping teens develop a positive *Relationship with Physical Activity*

Watch the
accompanying
video [here](#)



Encouraging your teen to find a physical activity they enjoy and to tune into their body is one of the best things you can do to improve their health and wellbeing. This tip sheet aims to help you support your teen to be BodyKind through supporting healthy attitudes and behaviours towards physical activity.

Physical activity has many benefits for adolescents. It can improve mood and help to manage stressors, as well as offer a range of physical health benefits. It can also help to improve body image, especially when the focus is on body functionality rather than appearance.

The more content a person feels in their body the more BodyKind they will be, which includes moving in ways that help their body to feel good.



Healthy, strong and fit bodies come in a range of shapes and sizes. Physical activity is for all bodies.



Much of the messaging in western society (i.e. from diet culture, fitness industry, social media) uses weight and body shape as the *motivator* for physical activity and exercise.

Studies show that focussing on weight can negatively impact a person's *relationship* with exercise, their self-esteem, body image and mental health.



Healthy Attitudes and Behaviours

- Moving for physical health gains; i.e. heart health, strong bones.
- Moving for mental health gains; manage stressors, improve mood.
- Listens to the body to avoid under or over trainings symptoms.
- Is regular, consistent and at different intensities and is fun!
- Can include training for competitive sports/activities.



Unhealthy Attitudes and Behaviours

- Exercise choices/activities motivated by weight loss/muscle gain.
- Over-training or under-training symptoms experienced; fatigue, injury, poor sleep, low mood, poor performance
- Compulsive or obsessive need to exercise/train/move.
- Stress/anxiety experienced if unable to exercise.
- High volume that is not supported by sufficient rest or nutrition.



What about teens involved in sport?

Teens involved in sport/activities (i.e. Dance), particularly at rep, development or sub-elite level have different training, nutrition and rest requirements. Adolescence is a time of rapid growth and change and it is important that teens and their bodies are well supported.

Athletes are considered higher risk of developing disordered eating and also eating disorders. This is particularly so for those involved in activities where there is an emphasis on weight, shape or appearance.

Additional risk factors:

- A focus on winning at all costs
- Unreasonably high standards / perfectionism
- Self-managed training without professional guidance
- Performance anxiety and fear of failure
- Transition periods – selection/de-selection, competition, off-season
- Illness or injury
- Social influences – coaches, team mates, competitors and culture

When should I be concerned?

If your teen engages in unhealthy behaviours from time to time, it is not necessarily cause for alarm. If behaviours are increasing/changing it may flag a sign that something more serious is developing.

Tips for parents of teens involved in sport

- Ensure their nutritional needs are met.
- Provide high energy and nutritious snacks for when they are on the go, between school/sporting activities. This may need to be adjusted to reflect different training requirements over the course of the year/season.
- Ensure training and nutritional advice is coming from a reputable and suitably trained source (qualified coaches, dietitians).

Concerned about someone?

Butterfly's free and confidential National Helpline can support you.

Phone Email Webchat
1800 33 4673 (1800 EDHOPE)
www.butterflynationalhelpline.org.au

Helping teens develop a positive relationship with eating cont.

As a parent/caregiver, your language, attitudes, values and behaviours towards physical activity have been influenced by many factors - the people in your life (family, friends, coaches), your culture, and your exposure to intense messaging around fitness, exercise and health.

You cannot be expected to get it right all the time. We encourage you to learn and unlearn when it comes to the relationship between health, weight, body size and exercise.

Tips for Parents/Caregivers

- Remind your teen all movement is beneficial, it doesn't have to always be high intensity. We need to move away from the 'all or nothing' mentality.
- Role model healthy exercise behaviours (i.e. for fun and health benefits) and talk about how it makes your body feel.
- Avoid using exercise or physical activity as a way to compensate for eating. Discourage language that suggests exercise is to 'burn off' foods or that certain foods can be worked for (i.e. If I do 10 mins of jogging, I can eat...).
- Explore your teen's motivations for movement in a non-judgemental and supportive way.
- Be mindful of fitness trackers that measure steps/calories or provide other metrics. These connect numbers to health which can be problematic for some, particularly teens who may exhibit competitive, obsessive and/or perfectionistic traits.
- If concerned about your child's weight or shape or performance, don't force exercise, competitive exercise programs or body transformation programs.
- Seek advice from reputable, evidence informed and suitably trained sources (rather than influencers).
- Focus on improving health behaviours first, rather than striving to change weight. Health is more than weight or muscle size.
- Support balanced and healthy exercise, that is fun and enjoyable. If your teen is becoming over-engaged in fitness, 'health' and training, explore to check that there is not something more serious developing.
- If your teen isn't interested in physical activity (and/or sports) do your best to role model movement for health and encourage them to join in.

Other Resources

[Australian Physical Activity Guidelines \(5-17yo\)](#)

[This Girl Can \(Victorian Government\)](#)

Concerned about a Teen?

Despite best parenting efforts serious body image issues and eating disorders can develop.

Changes in exercise behaviours, accompanied by changes in eating habits are often one of the first things noticed by parents/care-givers, but there are a range of other warning signs to look out for.

For more information see the video and tips sheet '[What to do if you are concerned](#)'.

Frequently Asked Questions

For some tips and guidance on how to manage tricky and challenging scenarios around training and exercise, please visit the [FAQs](#) page.

Topics covered include; Over-training behaviours, use of protein supplements and other muscle enhancing products (including steroids), obsession with muscle development.



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