

# NUTRITION MATTERS

## INFORMATION ABOUT DIETING FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS OF TWEENS AND TEENS

People often turn to dieting to try and change their bodies and feel better about themselves. But young people are growing and need the right amount of nutrients to be healthy. Not eating a variety of food or missing meals can be harmful for physical and mental health for not only young people but for everyone.

### What is wrong with dieting?

Diets that promise “quick and easy” weight loss by cutting out certain foods from our diet lack the scientific proof to support their claims and promises. Popular diets like the Paleo Diet, and Ketogenic Diet, promise quick weight loss but are not nutritionally balanced. This may result in missing important nutrients. These diets often promote lifestyle changes that are hard to maintain and can result in a pattern of losing weight and gaining it back. This yo-yo dieting is unhealthy for the body. Dieting can make teens feel hungry and preoccupied with food, distracted, tired, cold and dizzy. They may also feel sad and unmotivated to do things.

While it is common for young people to feel self-conscious, always feeling bad about their bodies, or feeling guilty when they eat or strictly following a diet or restricting their eating is not normal or healthy. This is called having a negative body image. Dieting adds to these negative feelings. Teens with a negative body image may also lack confidence in other areas of their lives.

### What can we do?

#### UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN ATTITUDE AND BELIEFS ABOUT WEIGHT

Sometimes we hold negative attitudes and beliefs about people who are overweight which can stigmatize and negatively impact well-being. This is known as weight bias. People on the receiving end of weight bias may experience psychosocial and physical consequences including increased risk of depression, anxiety, loneliness, substance use, suicidal thoughts, poor body image, low self-esteem, unhealthy eating behaviors, binge eating, decreased physical activity, and worsening of obesity. It is important to respect and recognize diversity and understand that ‘healthy bodies come in a variety of shapes and sizes’.

#### PUBLIC HEALTH

1-877-464-9675  
TTY 1-866-512-6228  
york.ca/nutrition

## BE A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL

Examine your own feelings about your body and be aware of the messages you send about your body and the comments you make about the appearance of others. Comments like "I'll get fat if I eat that" send a message to youth that appearance is very important.

## HELP YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP THE CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Educating young people to be critical of media can be a successful way to help deal with negative body image. Helping youth develop media literacy skills can help them to counteract messages that promote unrealistic body images and unhealthy eating. While media literacy is taught at school, it is also important that this education start at home. Parents can help their children to be critical of messages they receive from media channels, including social media.

## ENCOURAGE TWEENS/TEENS TO VALUE HEALTH OVER APPEARANCE

Good health comes from enjoying eating a variety of healthy food regularly, being active and sleeping well. Encourage youth to focus on their health rather than how they look. People can be healthy at a range of different body weights and remember just because someone is thin, doesn't mean they are healthy.

## HELP TWEENS/TEENS BRING THE "JOY" BACK INTO EATING

Healthy eating is more than the foods you eat. It is also about where, when, why and how you eat. We feel better when we're able to take time to enjoy the taste of food, the people we are eating with, and have positive experiences with eating. Remind young people that it, it is important to:

- sit down and take time to eat regular meals and snacks with their friends and family;
- enjoy a variety of food - deciding how much to eat based on how hungry or full they are;
- learn about where food comes from, how to prepare it and how to use food labels;
- eat lots of vegetables and fruit, whole grains and protein foods; choosing plant-based protein foods more often;
- make water their drink of choice

Lastly, help young people and others understand that healthy eating **doesn't mean eating only healthy foods**. People shouldn't feel guilt or shame about their food or beverages choices. It's the overall eating pattern that is important. Healthy eating should contribute to enjoyment, satisfaction, mental and physical well-being. Healthy eating can look a little different for everyone!

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional resources for children and teens about weight, dieting and eating behaviours, visit [www.ellensatterinstitute.org](http://www.ellensatterinstitute.org)

To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000 or visit [www.unlockfood.ca](http://www.unlockfood.ca).

For lesson plans for grades 1-12 on media education visit Media Smarts website at [www.mediasmarts.ca](http://www.mediasmarts.ca)

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