



## Creating healthy eating habits

In today's busy world, it can be increasingly difficult to focus on healthy eating – when it comes to crunch time, a lot of us reach for what is most convenient: fast food, frozen meals and snacks that lack nutrients. Like any habit, learning to eat healthy foods is within reach. Below we will go over some strategies for encouraging healthy eating.

### What is the difference between healthy eating and dieting?

With new diets being promoted constantly and advertised online and in magazines, when we think of healthy eating we often think of dieting. However, they are not the same thing. Diets are usually something people do for a month or two and then drop and are most often geared towards fast weight loss that is rarely sustainable. Diets often focus on cutting calories and fats or restricting specific foods. Healthy eating habits are, however, about balance and about making choices that will continue throughout your life, not just for a brief period. In other words, diets are temporary while healthy eating habits are for life.

### Why are healthy eating habits important?

Eating healthy foods consistently not only will regulate your weight but it will have long term positive effects on your overall health. Eating nutrient dense foods leads to healthier skin, improved digestive health, increased energy and focus and lowers your risk of diabetes and heart disease down the road. On top of all that, eating well is proven to improve your mood and sharpen your cognitive functioning.

### Where to begin?

It can be overwhelming at first to switch to healthy eating habits. Some good rules of thumb are cutting out refined sugars, saturated fats and processed foods. If you eat a lot of those things, how do you shift a habit overnight? The answer is, you don't, not overnight. Start small and tweak your habits gently. Here are some ideas on where to begin:

- **2 out of 3 rule:** If two out of three of your meals in a day are home cooked – and we aren't talking canned or frozen here – this is a great start. Food you prepare yourself out of whole ingredients is going to be automatically much healthier than pre-packaged and restaurant food.

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- **Fruits and nuts replace chips and chocolate:** Pack healthy snacks and bring them with you to school or work. These can be packets of raw nuts and seeds, fresh and dried fruits and plain unsweetened yogurts.
- **Change your grains:** Replace your white grains with brown ones and opt for whole grains: instead of white bread, eat whole grain bread, instead of white rice choose brown.
- **Drink water not sugar:** Replace your sodas and fruit juices with glasses of water and you will immediately begin to break the cycle of sugar addiction.
- **Everything in moderation, even moderation:** If you never allow yourself treats, you are going to feel miserable and left out when people around you are enjoying that delicious looking dessert or plate of fries at the end of the week. So indulge once in a while! If you are making healthy choices 90% of the time, allow yourself those treats the other 10%.

Habits can be hard to change but over time you will notice that the foods you crave are not what they used to be. The more you feed your body whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables and lean meats and legumes, the more these will be what your body asks for. That's when you'll know that what once felt like a "diet" has surely become a lifestyle.

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## Parents' Guide: Teens, social media, and depression

Teenagers are known for being moody and emotionally unpredictable; a teen who is apathetic one day and passionate the next is almost a cliché. For this reason, it is often easy to write off these low moods, dramatic acts and disinterested behaviors as just normal growing pains. However, depression among teens is a real concern, and a growing one: recent studies suggest that 11.5% of teens have had a Major Depressive Episode (MDE) in the last 12 months – that's up from 8.7% in 2008. In this article, we will break down some of the contributing factors to depression in teens and offer some practical advice about signs to watch out for in the teens in your life.

### Stigma and seeking help

Thankfully, many organizations and individuals are doing important work to decrease stigma around depression. There are way more positive representations of people living with mental illness – and functioning normally – than there were even ten years ago. This may mean that teens are more likely to seek help for these issues. However, stigma is still an obstacle for a lot of teens and adults alike.

### Social media and mental health

One of the biggest changes in the past ten years is the proliferation of social media. These days, teens are connected to their peers near and far at an unprecedented level. A huge factor that contributes to teen depression and anxiety is **cyber-bullying**: social media makes it easier than ever before for teens to inflict cruelty on one another and that cruelty has a strong impact on mental health.

At the same time, social media may also have some upsides for mental health: lots of teens are now using sites like Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr to share experiences of anxiety and depression. This can lead teens to understand that they are not suffering alone, further decreasing stigma and encouraging them to seek help.

This means that social media is neither all good nor all bad and so is probably best used in moderation. Work together with your teen to come up with a reasonable amount of screen time spent with smartphones and computers.

### Signs to lookout for

How do you know if the teens in your life are just experiencing the normal mood swings of growing up or if they have a serious problem? Here are some internal and external signs to keep an eye out for that might be linked to depression

**Internal signs:** These are signs of depression that you may notice in your teen's behavior and habits, and does not necessarily have a direct link to what is going on in the outside world.

- **Extended periods of sadness:** A major depressive episode (MDE) is defined as a period of more than two weeks of consistent low mood.
- **Loss of interest in activities:** If your teen used to love painting, music, sports or other activities but seems suddenly to not be interested in anything, this might be a sign of depression.
- **Social withdrawal.**
- **Changes in sleep patterns and/or appetite.**

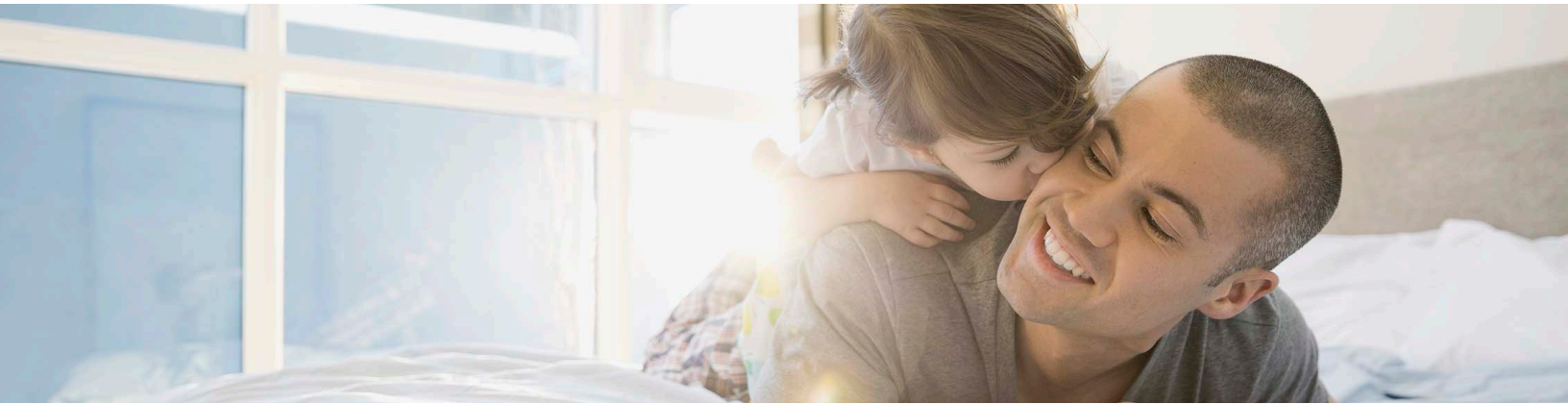
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**External signs:** These are things that affect your teen's life that may lead to depression and anxiety:

- Grief and loss of a loved one or peer.
- The end of a romantic relationship.
- Failures in school or extracurricular activities.

If the teen(s) in your life are showing signs of depression, insist that they speak to a counselor. Even if they are not clinically depressed, speaking to an empathetic and kind professional is never a bad idea and can even prevent depression down the road.

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