

GROWING UP WITH EXERCISE

Teenage girls staying active

TEENAGE GIRLS SHOULD BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE EVERY DAY



Women in Sport • Fact Sheet

BODY IMAGE AND ADOLESCENCE

Body image is all about how people see themselves. It is the mental picture created about the way we think we look. It's how we feel about the size, shape, weight and look of our bodies. Many times the perception of what is acceptable in terms of body image is the result of unrealistic and unattainable images and representations that are portrayed in the media. As a result many teenagers have inaccurate

perceptions of what they think they should weigh and how they should look.

Many consider themselves to be above their desired weight, even when it is within the healthy range for their age. This can cause many teenage girls to feel unhappy about their bodies. Dissatisfaction with body weight and the way they look often peaks during adolescence and early adulthood.

TIPS FOR MAINTAINING A HEALTHY BODY IMAGE

- Try to accept that everyone is different. Learn to like your body, no matter what its size or shape!
- Look around and you will see that teenagers and women come in all body shapes and sizes.
- Understand that only a very small proportion of women are supermodels or look like the models in magazines. It is not only unhealthy, but also impossible to look like this. Remember that the wonders of modern technology allow any blemishes or 'imperfections' to be edited out of the picture.
- Focus on your positive qualities, other than how your body looks. For example, take pride in your achievements at school or in a sport or other activity; or your ability to develop and maintain valued friendships.



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FURTHER INFORMATION

Sports Medicine Australia

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Dietitians Association of Australia

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Sports Dietitians Australia

03 9425 0015
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Other useful resources include:

- Everyone wants to be more active. The problem is getting started
- Food for Health, Australian Dietary Guidelines for Adults, Children and Adolescents
- Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

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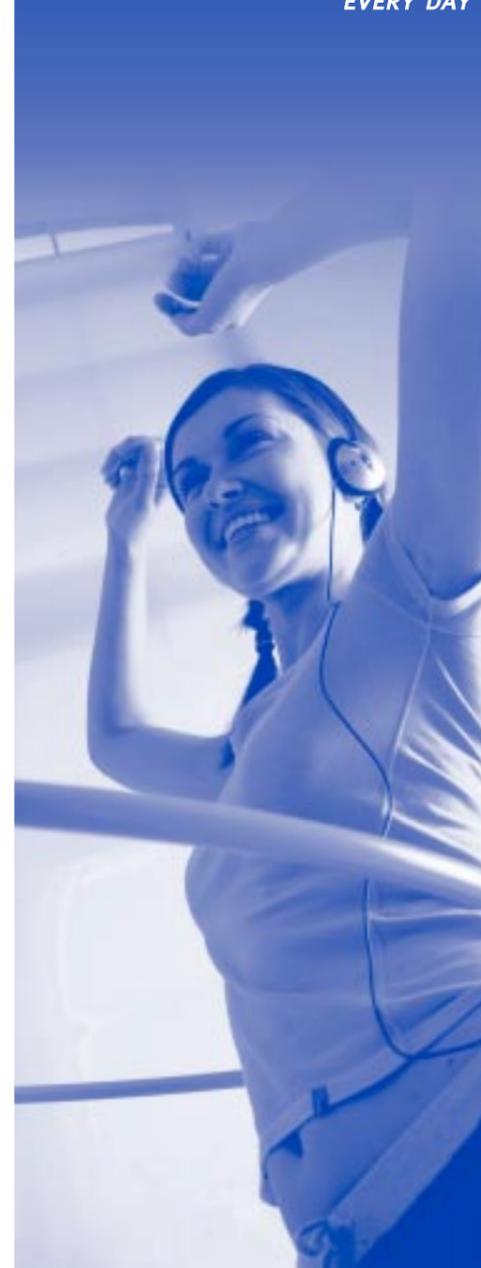
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Going through adolescence is an exciting, but often difficult time for many teenage girls. The transition through adolescence can be helped if girls understand, and are prepared for, the physical and emotional changes they are likely to go through. Encouragement to participate in regular physical activity can also be beneficial in managing this transition.

WHAT IS ADOLESCENCE?

Adolescence is the period of life between childhood and adulthood and generally coincides with the teenage years.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING ADOLESCENCE?

Adolescence is a time of rapid change that can affect teenage girls physically, emotionally and mentally. During this time many girls will desire to be more independent from their families. They often develop stronger relationships outside their families and begin to form their own ideas about what matters most to them.

PUBERTY

Puberty is the phase of adolescence when the body changes to become sexually mature, caused by the rapid release of female hormones into the body.

PHYSICAL CHANGES DURING PUBERTY

As girls enter puberty, they undergo a great many physical changes, not only in size and shape, but in such things as:

- the growth of pubic, underarm, and other body hair
- increased body odour
- the development of breasts
- the start of menstruation
- A rapid increase in height (growth spurt) - most growth will be

completed by the end of puberty.

- The laying down of extra fat tissue in preparation for child-bearing.
- Possibly more oily skin and pimples.

During puberty the body also builds the strength of bones (bone density).

EMOTIONAL CHANGES DURING ADOLESCENCE

Girls often experience many emotional changes during their adolescence. These changes are usually a result of many things happening at once, such as:

- Mood changes caused by the very quick and rapid increases in hormones during puberty.
- The embarrassment that many young people feel as their bodies begin to change and appear different to their friends.
- The large demand on energy stores as the body changes, which can lead to fluctuating energy levels (from extreme tiredness to unending energy).

In addition, the onset of physical changes combined with the pressure and expectations placed upon them by peers, cultural backgrounds or the community can also add to the moods, stress and feelings of girls at this time of their life.

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TIPS FOR DEALING WITH MOOD CHANGES

- Learn to recognise your mood swings and understand that these feelings won't last forever
- If you feel stressed or sad, try talking to somebody about your problems such as a trusted family member, friend, relative or teacher
- Include physically activity in your lifestyle; research shows that regular physical activity is helpful for preventing depression and anxiety. Eg. take a walk, play your favourite sport
- Listen to your favourite music or watch a favourite movie
- Try a yoga or relaxation class
- If low moods or depression are severe and long-lasting (i.e. more than two weeks), talk to your doctor or a counsellor

THE EXPERIENCE OF ADOLESCENCE WILL BE DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE

While the physical changes that occur during puberty are very similar, the timing of puberty and the degree of change will vary. Some girls may begin puberty at 10 while others may not start until as late as 14. Physical changes and mood swings will vary depending on the individual.

LIVING WITH MENSTRUAL CYCLES (PERIODS)

Beginning periods or menstrual cycles is a sign that a girl is becoming a woman. However, having periods, and coping with the social intricacies associated with such occasions, can be an embarrassing and self-conscious experience for some girls.

This is particularly true when other friends have not yet started their menstrual cycles or when participating in activities such as swimming.

For some girls, there can be discomfort (bloating, headaches, pain) at the start of each period; others may feel no discomfort at all. It is important for girls to understand how to use pads or tampons - whichever is most comfortable. Girls should be able to, and encouraged to, participate in their usual day-to-day activities during their periods and should not avoid physical activity. Physical activity may indeed help relieve the discomfort often associated with periods.

IMPORTANCE OF EXERCISE FOR TEENAGE GIRLS

Regular physical activity throughout life is important for everyone. For teenage girls, there are particular reasons why it's good to be active. Not only is physical activity important for good health and overall fitness, it can also help to deal with the often difficult transition though puberty including helping to even-out emotions and mood swings and help you feel good about yourself.

Other benefits include:

- Helping to maintain a healthy body weight
- Making muscle and bones stronger
- Improving fitness
- Improving heart health
- The opportunity to have fun and interact with friends and/or family

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY TRENDS IN TEENAGE GIRLS

Despite the importance of physical activity, many girls are less active during their teenage years. For girls, the transition from primary school to high school often coincides with a dramatic drop in participation in organised sport and other moderate to vigorous physical activity.

Reasons for this drop off include a lack of time, competing priorities such as part time work, school and family commitments and a lack of positive role models.

AUSTRALIAN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 12-18 YEAR OLDS (1)

Teenage girls should do at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. This can be built up throughout the day with a variety of activities. Remember, being physically active doesn't mean you have to do competitive sport, or go to the gym, and you can always do more if you want to! To reap the greatest benefits, physical activity should be done at a moderate to vigorous intensity.

- Moderate intensity includes brisk walking, hiking, bike riding with friends, shooting hoops in the backyard, skateboarding and dancing
- Vigorous intensity includes running, football, netball, soccer, swimming laps or training for sport

Vigorous intensity includes activities that make you "huff and puff". Including some vigorous activity for 20 minutes on three to four days a week will provide additional benefits.

In addition to building physical activity into your day, also think about reducing the amount of 'sedentary' activities you do (things done lying or sitting down). Limiting the amount of television you watch or computer activity you do to less than two hours each day may be helpful.

INTENSE EXERCISE DURING THE TEENAGE YEARS

There are some girls who train for sports that involve long hours of intense training (i.e. swimming, athletics, gymnastics, and tennis). This presents particular challenges for their bodies as these girls need to grow and mature, while accommodating their intense training schedules.

It is important that girls participating in intense training are well supervised and eat a well balanced diet that provides enough energy and adequate quantities of all nutrients essential for growth and maturation.

Girls involved in intense training and not eating well (diets that are not balanced and have inadequate energy for growth and maturation) are at increased risk of reduced growth and delayed maturation. Delayed maturation can include entering puberty later than normal, slow progression through puberty and delay in the occurrence of the first menstrual cycle.

Girls should consult a medical practitioner if they are (i) 16 years or older and has not had her first menstrual cycle (primary amenorrhea) or (ii) has previously been menstruating regularly, but has not had a menstrual cycle in the past 3 months (secondary amenorrhea).

Potential consequences for reduced growth and delayed maturation include short stature, low bone density and irregular menstrual cycles (secondary amenorrhea).

NUTRITION FOR ACTIVE TEENAGE GIRLS

As well as keeping active, eating a balanced and healthy diet is also important for girls. Their daily food intake should include a wide variety of foods from each of the five major food groups to ensure they receive all essential nutrients.

Girls who are vegetarians and also physically active, should talk to their family and help plan their meals in order to meet all their daily nutrient requirements. In particular, vegetarians should eat plenty of foods high in protein and iron, including wholegrain breads and cereals, spinach, legumes, dried apricots, nuts and seeds.

All girls who play sport or are physically active should pay special attention to including calcium and iron-rich foods in their diet. More information on nutrition is contained in the "Nutrition for Sportswomen" fact sheet, that is part of this series.

Active girls are at increased risk of developing heat stress when exercising in hot and humid conditions. It is important that to emphasise the need for plenty of fluid before, during and after exercise. Refer to the Smartplay "Drink Up" brochure for further information.