Regular physical activity is important for health throughout a person’s life. Physical activity benefits physical, social, and mental health. This is important for helping to move through issues during the adolescent years.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING ACTIVE?**

- Having fun interacting with friends and family
- Building self-esteem and contributing to psychological wellbeing
- Helping maintain a healthy body weight
- Making muscles and bones stronger
- Improving cardiovascular and aerobic fitness
- Improving heart health
- Developing healthy habits that can be carried into adulthood
- Regular physical activity is associated with better academic achievement

**WHAT SHOULD YOU EAT?**

Eating a balanced and healthy diet is extremely important. Daily food intake should include foods from each of the five major food groups e.g. milk, cheese, yoghurt and iron-rich foods, red meat, chicken, seafood, green leafy vegetables in their diet. It is also important to drink plenty of water.

**Activities of moderate to vigorous intensity include:**

- Brisk walking
- Hiking
- Bike riding
- Skateboarding
- Dancing
- Running
- Football
- Netball
- Soccer
- Swimming

Any exercise that is considered ‘weight bearing’ is great for your bone health. Non-weight bearing exercises, while still beneficial, will only improve your aerobic health.

**Practical tips for exercise**

- Start gradually
- Warm up and stretch
- Stay hydrated
- Don’t exercise in the heat of the day
- Wear footwear that is comfortable and appropriate for the type of exercise

**Body image**

- Many adolescents feel unhappy with their body weight and how they look during adolescence
- Many teenagers have incorrect views of what they think they should weigh and how they should look. Often unrealistic and unattainable images and representations in the media are to blame
- Women come in different body shapes and sizes, you do not need to be a size 8 to be healthy

**Vegetarians**

Vegetarians need to eat foods high in protein and iron including wholegrain breads and cereals, spinach, legumes, dried apricots, nuts and seeds.

**TIP**

Limit TV and computer leisure activity to less than two hours per day. Try to break up the amount of sitting you do as much as possible.

**TIP**

Try to accept everyone is different. Learn to like your body, no matter what size or shape.

**MAINTAINING A HEALTHY BODY IMAGE**

- Understand only a few women are supermodels or look like models in magazines. It is not only unhealthy but impossible to look like this due to image ‘airbrushing’.
- Focus on other achievements i.e. at school or in sport, or the ability to develop and maintain friendships, rather than how your body looks.
- Set fitness goals not body shape goals, i.e. Can you increase the number of push-ups you can do? How long can you run for?
ARE YOU INVOLVED IN HIGH LEVEL SPORTS TRAINING?

It is important that adolescent girls participating in intense training are well supervised and eat a well-balanced diet that provides enough energy and nutrients essential for growth, maturation and training. Girls should consult a doctor if they are 16 years or older and have not had their first menstrual cycle or have not had a menstrual cycle in a three month period.

FEMALE ATHLETE TRIAD AND BONE STRENGTH

The Female Athlete Triad refers to the unhealthy results of having three conditions: poor nutrition, low bone density and having irregular, unusual or non-existing periods. Not eating enough or eating foods that do not provide adequate nutrition for exercise can cause your bones to become brittle over time (poor bone health) or can create dangerous changes in your menstrual cycle. If you notice these changes or know somebody that is exercising but not eating well or having irregular periods, talk to them, or get support from a teacher, parent or coach.

DEALING WITH MOOD CHANGES

TIP  Be active. Research shows this helps prevent depression and anxiety.

TIP  Learn to recognise mood swings and understand that these feelings won’t last forever.

TIP  Feel stressed or sad? Talk to somebody about your problems. If this feeling lasts for more than two weeks, talk to a doctor or counsellor.

TIP  Listen to music, watch a movie, try yoga or a relaxation class.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Sports Medicine Australia
03 9674 8777

Australia’s Physical Activity & Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines for Young People (13 -17 year olds)

Sports Dietitians Australia
www.sportsdietitians.com.au

References
For a full list of references, contact Sports Medicine Australia.

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