



Français en page 507

## Dieting: Information for teens

If you're a teenager, you see them everywhere: media messages telling you to change yourself. They're in magazines, on the Internet, on television and at the movies. Most are ads designed to get you to buy something, like clothes, makeup or a weight loss product.

One of the strongest messages you get is that you need to be thin. Images and words in the media tell you that being thin means that you are beautiful, happy and in control of your life. But in real life, people who are happy and successful come in all shapes and sizes.

Along with the pressure to be thin, you hear about different ways to lose weight. When we hear about 'going on a diet', we usually think about eating less or eating differently to try to lose weight. Going on a diet can mean making some good choices about nutrition (eating more fruit, vegetables and fibre, or cutting down on snack foods) or bad choices (skipping meals, eating too little or not eating enough variety of food).

Many teens turn to dieting to try to change their body and feel better about themselves. Unfortunately, it usually doesn't work. Dieting actually causes some people to gain weight.

Teens who diet are often more concerned with how they look than about their health. And this can lead to weight-loss goals that are not healthy.

If you're thinking about dieting, or have dieted in the past, this information sheet is for you. It has facts about dieting, and suggestions about what to do and where to go if you are concerned about your weight.

### Did you know? Fast facts about teens and dieting

- About one-half of teenage girls (one in every two) and one-quarter (one in every four) of teenage boys have tried dieting to change the shape of their body.
- More than one in three girls (about 33%) who are actually at a healthy weight try to diet.
- Teens who don't feel good about themselves are more likely to diet. Compared with teens who don't diet, teens who do:
  - are more unhappy with their weight;

- tend to 'feel fat' even if they are not;
- have lower self-esteem;
- feel less connected to their families and schools; and
- feel less in control of their lives.

### You hear a lot about how bad it is to be fat, so what is the problem with dieting?

- If you want to get to and stay at a healthy weight, going on a diet is not a good solution. It rarely works.
- Over time, you may be more likely to gain weight if you try to diet. This is probably because going without the foods you enjoy makes you feel deprived and sad, which may lead to overeating.
- Dieting may make you feel:
  - hungry and preoccupied with food (thinking about it all the time);
  - distracted and tired;
  - sad and unmotivated;
  - cold and dizzy; and
  - deprived of foods you enjoy.
- Some forms of dieting can be dangerous to your health, such as skipping meals, using weight loss pills or laxatives, going on 'crash' diets or vomiting after eating.
- Teens are still growing and need the right amount of nutrients to be healthy. Eliminating entire food groups or taking in too few calories when you are still developing can have serious negative effects on your health.

### Lots of teens talk about their weight. Isn't it normal to worry?

- It's common for teens to feel self-conscious. But constantly feeling bad about your body, worrying about your weight or feeling guilty when you eat is not normal or healthy. Sometimes this is called having a negative body image. Teens who have a

negative body image often lack confidence in other areas of their lives as well.

- If you think you worry too much about your weight or if having a negative body image is interfering with your happiness, try to tell an adult you trust, like a parent, teacher or doctor.
- Taking good care of your body by eating well and being physically active is a good way to feel better about yourself. It's important to be aware of the amount and quality of food you eat, but you shouldn't be obsessed with it.
- Here are some tips for healthy eating:
  - Eat a wide variety of foods every day.
  - Eat breakfast every day.
  - Eat when you are hungry and stop when you are full.
  - Enjoy all four food groups every day. Following Canada's Food Guide can be helpful ([www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/onpp-bppn/food\\_guide\\_rainbow\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/onpp-bppn/food_guide_rainbow_e.html))
  - Choose water instead of soft drinks or juice.
  - Choose foods that are high in cereal fibre like bran, wheat and rye including cereal or cereal bars.
  - When you eat out, stop eating once you are full. Remember that in most restaurants (especially fast food restaurants) portions are bigger than most people need at a meal.

- Don't use food to make yourself feel better when you are bored, sad or upset.

- Physical activity is an important part of staying healthy and feeling good about yourself. Spend time everyday doing something active you enjoy, with people you enjoy.

**For more information about healthy eating and activity:**

*Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating:*  
<[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/onpp-bppn/food\\_guide\\_rainbow\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hpfb-dgpsa/onpp-bppn/food_guide_rainbow_e.html)>

*Canada's Physical Activity Guides for Children and Youth:*  
<[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/paguide/child\\_youth/index.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/paguide/child_youth/index.html)>

*Canadian Paediatric Society's Healthy Active Living program:* <[www.cps.ca/english/proadv/HAL/index.htm](http://www.cps.ca/english/proadv/HAL/index.htm)>

*Dietitians of Canada:* <[www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)>

*Canadian Health Network:* Visit <[www.canadian-health-network.ca](http://www.canadian-health-network.ca)> and click on "youth".

*TeensHealth (Nemours Foundation):*  
<[www.kidshealth.org/teen/index.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/index.html)>

**For more information about weight pre-occupation and eating disorders:**

*The National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC):* <[www.nedic.ca](http://www.nedic.ca)>

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Also available at [www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca)

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