

# Health

## Being physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy

"We are indeed much more than what we eat, but what we eat can nevertheless help us to be much more than what we are."

*Adelle Davis*

Imagine that someone gives you a fancy new car. As you read your owner's manual, you discover that it likes to guzzle high-octane, expensive supreme gas. You decide that your car should have less expensive tastes, so you feed it regular gas. After a year or so, the engine coughs, sputters, and dies. Because a new engine costs thousands of dollars, you decide to get a different car instead.

Your body is like a fancy car. It requires high-quality fruits, vegetables, grains, and proteins to keep its engine running—but if something goes wrong with your body, you can't replace it. "Wait!" you might say. "My Great Aunt Harriet is 105 years old, and she chain-smokes cigars and eats french fries every day." Maybe so, but what does that have to do with you? It's true that some people have heredity on their side. No matter how they abuse their bodies, they seem to be okay. Most people aren't like that, however. And you can't be sure which side of the family your genes come from. Maybe your Great Uncle Harry died at age 30.

You are what you eat, and you'll definitely be healthier if you give your mind and body the fuel it needs. When you were younger, you may have learned about the Four Basic Food Groups: 1) meat, fish, poultry, and eggs, 2) dairy products, 3) vegetables and fruits, and 4) grains. More recently, the U.S.

Department of Agriculture has recast the Four Basic Groups into a Food Guide Pyramid that places more emphasis on bread, cereal, rice, and pasta, less emphasis on meat, poultry, and fish. The Pyramid (see page 104) also includes recommended numbers of daily servings from each group. It's a great place to start learning how to eat right.

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### CHECK IT OUT



#### U.S. Department of Agriculture

Washington, DC 20250

(202) 720-2791

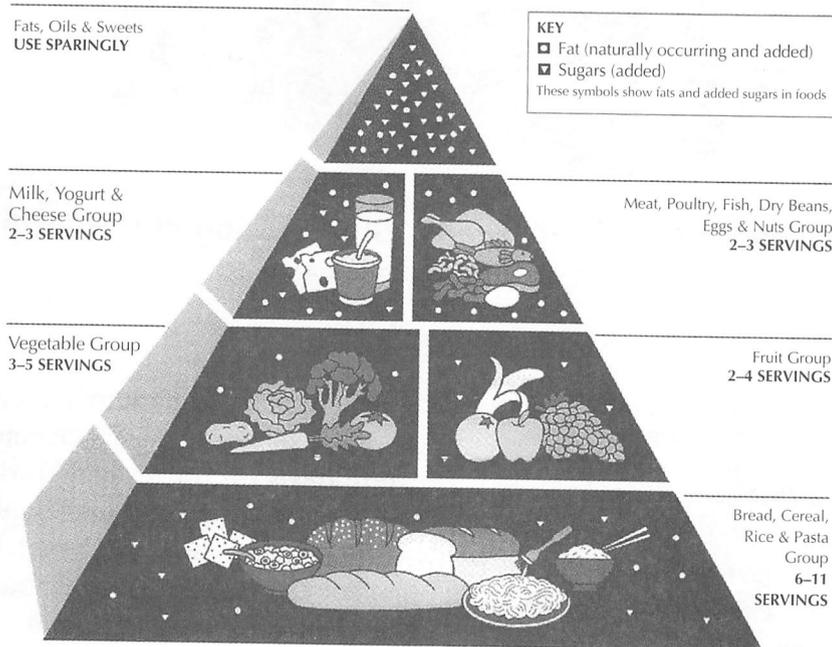
<http://www.usda.gov/>

The USDA is an excellent source of up-to-date information about nutrition. Write or call to find out about current publications, or visit the Web site and explore the Food and Nutrition Information Center (FNIC) section. Links on the FNIC homepage (<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/>) will take you to a list of publications and databases including the Food Guide Pyramid, Dietary Guidelines for Americans, and an index of Food and Nutrition Internet Resources.

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Maybe you've defined some food groups of your own—burgers, shakes, sugar, caffeine, and chips. The good news is, you can retrain your taste buds to be just as happy with sweet grapes as they are with sugary shakes.

You might have special nutritional needs. Maybe something that's good for your sister isn't good for you. For example, you may have an allergy



to milk. Start with the Pyramid, pay attention to your body, use your common sense, and talk to your doctor if you have any questions. Everybody—every body—is different.

## How to Be Physically Healthy

“When it comes to your health, I recommend frequent doses of that rare commodity among Americans—common sense.”

*Vincent Askey*

**Listen to your body.** Do you get lightheaded if you go more than four hours without eating? Maybe you need to eat more often and increase the amount of protein you consume. Or maybe it’s a sign that you’re eating too much sugar. Change your eating habits and see what happens.

**Eat a variety of wholesome foods.** Use the USDA’s Food Guide Pyramid as a guideline. Many people are vegetarians who get their protein from dairy and non-meat products; evidence shows that this, too, is a

healthful way to live. Some vegetarians are vegans (“vee-guns”) who don’t consume any animal products (meaning no dairy products or eggs). This diet can be very healthful as long as it includes protein from other sources like beans, grains, and nuts.

### CHECK IT OUT



*A Teen’s Guide to Going Vegetarian* by Judy Krizmanic (New York: Puffin, 1994). This book covers all the bases, from nutritional requirements to dealing with anxious parents and friends. Ages 12 & up.

#### The Vegetarian Youth Network

PO Box 1141  
 New Paltz, NY 12561

<http://www.geocities.com/RodeoDrive/1154/>

An informal grassroots organization run by and for teenagers who support compassionate, healthy, globally aware vegetarian/vegan living. If you contact the VYN in writing, enclose a self-addressed stamped business-size envelope.

**Keep the lid on fats, oils, and sweets.** An occasional splurge won’t hurt you, but don’t make fried foods the focus of every meal. And go easy on the sugar. A single bottle of soda contains anywhere from 30–50 grams of sugar—about 7–9 teaspoons. (Think about

## National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)

1-800-SAY-NO-TO (1-800-729-6686)

PO Box 2345

Rockville, MD 20847-2345

<http://www.health.org>

Part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, NCADI is the world's largest resource for current information and materials about substance abuse prevention. Ask about free fact sheets, brochures, pamphlets, posters, and videos. On the Web site, be sure to visit:

### For Kids Only

<http://www.health.org/kidsareal/index.htm>

### Girl Power!

<http://www.health.org/gpower/index.htm>

### Tips for Teens

<http://www.health.org/tipteens.htm>

### A Guide for Teens

<http://www.health.org/pubs/guidteen.htm>

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**Don't obsess about your weight.** Instead, find your *set point*—your own healthy weight. You'll feel better, look better, and stay healthier if you find the weight your body wants to be. Don't worry if your set point isn't the same as your friends'; your bodies are different. When you're eating sensibly, aren't always hungry, have plenty of energy, and generally feel "balanced" and comfortable, you're there. Avoid excesses (eating too much or too little), which can lead to eating disorders.

There are three types of eating disorders, and they affect *both* females and males, although more girls than boys tend to have problems with them.

- *Bulimia nervosa* involves eating too much (binge eating) and then getting rid of it (purging).
- *Anorexia nervosa* involves self-imposed starvation.
- *Compulsive eating* involves bingeing without purging, which leads to obesity and constant dieting.

All three types can become so serious that they require treatment. In some cases, eating disorders lead to death. As in this true story. . .

Claire<sup>2</sup> was a popular 14-year-old at her junior high school. She was a hard worker and a cheer-

leader with high grades. But she was afraid of getting "fat," so she began secretly purging after she ate. Soon she discovered that if she put a small amount of baking soda in water and drank it, the mixture would taste so disgusting that she automatically threw up.

One morning, Claire's mother heard a scream from the upstairs bathroom. She rushed upstairs to find Claire doubled over in pain, and as Claire choked out what was wrong, her mother learned that Claire had dumped *several teaspoons* of baking soda into a glass of water and swallowed it down.

You might remember from science experiments what happens when you mix baking soda with vinegar. The "volcano" erupts, or the cork shoots sky-high off the top of the soda bottle. That's what happened to Claire. The baking soda mixed with the acid in her stomach, producing large amounts of carbon dioxide. The pain grew excruciating as Claire's abdomen swelled like a basketball.

Although Claire's mother rushed her to the hospital, it was already too late. The swelling had cut off the blood supply to Claire's organs. During the night, this bright young woman with everything to live for died of organ failure.

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## CHECK IT OUT



*Food Fight: A Guide to Eating Disorders for Pre-Teens and Their Parents* by Janet Bode (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997). This comprehensive guide to eating disorders discusses their causes, symptoms, and solutions. Ages 11 & up.

*Taking Charge of My Mind & Body: A Girls' Guide to Outsmarting Alcohol, Drug, Smoking, and Eating Problems* by Gladys Folkers, M.A., and Jeanne Engelmann (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1997). Facts about alcohol, drugs, smoking, and eating problems, myths and reality checks, warning signs, stories from girls who have "been there," and strategies for building resistance skills. Ages 11-18.

### American Anorexia/Bulimia Association

165 West 46th Street, Suite 1108

New York, NY 10036

(212) 575-6200

Information and referrals to clinics, counselors, and support groups in your area.

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<sup>2</sup> Not her real name.

eating nine teaspoons of sugar. Doesn't that make you sick?) Sugar by any other name—glucose, sucrose, fructose, corn syrup—is still sugar, as are the so-called “natural” sugars.

Sugar sends you on a rollercoaster ride. You rise and then you drop. You drink a soda or eat a candy bar, and you experience a buzz and burst of energy. Then your pancreas starts secreting insulin, which carries the sugar to your liver. Then your liver kicks into overdrive to get rid of the extra blood sugar. Before you know it, you're crashing, cranky, and looking for another sugar fix.



**Avoid caffeine.** If you drink four cans of soda or four cups of coffee a day, you're probably hooked on caffeine—unless you're a decaf drinker. How can you tell if you're a caffeine fiend? Try going without it for a day or two. If you get a headache that goes away when you drink caffeine, that's a sure sign.

Caffeine can make your heart race, keep you awake at night, give you stomachaches and scary dreams, and make you so jittery that you start drumming your fingers on your desk (and driving everyone around you crazy). And it's not only in soda and coffee. Caffeine is also found in chocolate, cold capsules, cough syrups, and headache medication. When in doubt, read the product label.

**Limit your salt and sodium intake.** Too much salt can raise your blood pressure. A little goes a long way, and you can train your tongue to like less. TIP:

Try some fresh-ground black pepper or an herbal flavoring instead.

**Exercise regularly.** When you exercise, you strengthen your cardiopulmonary system, stimulate your vital organs, and keep your body flexible. For most people, it's sufficient to exercise for at least 30 minutes three to four times a week. If you need advice on what to do and how often to do it, ask your gym teacher or a coach at your school or community center. If you've been a slow-moving sloth until now, talk with your doctor before starting an exercise program.

**Get enough sleep.** Most people need to sleep an average of eight hours a night. Some need less sleep; others need more. Too much sleep can be an escape—a way to avoid problems or responsibilities. If you find yourself sleeping 10–12 hours every night and taking naps during the day, ask yourself what's happening in your life. Is there something you need to face, fix, decide, or do?

**Stay away from alcohol, drugs, and smoking.** Studies indicate that as much as 85 percent of all crime is related to alcohol and drugs. According to the National Safety Council, more than 4 million American teenagers have serious problems with alcohol. Most teens don't use drugs, but millions do. The American Cancer Society estimates that cigarette smoking causes 87 percent of all deaths from lung cancer; more than 3,000 teenagers start smoking each day. Alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes are the main causes of early and preventable illness, disease, disability, and death in the United States today.

Be smart and don't start. If you've already started, quit. Help is available from many sources, including toll-free information and counseling hotlines.<sup>1</sup>

## CHECK IT OUT



### Drug Information Database

<http://www.drugfreeamerica.org/>

Comprehensive, accurate, up-to-date information from the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, the organization behind many of the antidrug TV and print ads you see.

<sup>1</sup> See also “Cleanliness,” page 49, for how to contact SADD (Students Against Driving Drunk).

## Anti-Graffiti Club



- neighborhood/community safety (sidewalks, playgrounds, traffic control, pedestrian walkways, public parks)
- preventing freak accidents
- sport/recreation safety (swimming, boating, biking, hunting, camping, climbing, walking, etc.)
- travel safety (automobile, bus, school bus, train, air travel, etc.)
- what else?

**3. Disease prevention.** You might work to prevent disease by promoting:

- affordable health insurance
- anti-smoking efforts
- childhood immunizations
- clean water/air
- free or low-cost community clinics
- alleviating local or world hunger
- public awareness of alcohol and drug abuse
- public awareness of communicable diseases
- what else?

**4. Disaster prevention and preparation.** You could help to educate people about:

- droughts
- earthquakes
- fires

- floods
- hurricanes
- landslides
- tornadoes
- volcanoes
- what else?

**5. National safety.** On behalf of your own country and other countries around the world, you might speak out about and work against:

- germ warfare
- landmines
- nuclear attacks
- what else?

“The world’s children deserve to walk the earth in safety.”  
*President Bill Clinton*

On the local level, you can encourage your family to develop safe habits. You can be watchful and careful about the things you do on your own and with friends. You can work to reduce crime in your school. You have the right to learn in a safe environment free from bullying, vandalism, violence, drugs and alcohol, and discipline problems. Unsafe and problem situations are created by only a small number of students. Imagine what might happen if the rest of you spoke out and took action to create a safe, supportive, nurturing school.

## Character Dilemmas

*For journaling or writing essays, discussion, debate, role-playing, reflection*

Suppose that . . .

**1** You’re passing a frozen pond when you hear someone screaming for help who has fallen through the ice. The victim is too far from shore for you to reach out a hand, and if you walk onto the ice you’ll probably fall through, too. The victim’s head is bobbing in the water, and the temperature is below freezing. What might you do? How might you work to prevent such accidents in the future?

② You have a friend who's being pressured to join a gang. She has told you that this Friday after school, gang members will "jump" her—a form of initiation. You've warned your friend to take another way home, but she thinks it's too late to do anything about the gang. She doesn't feel she has any choice about joining, and she has warned you to mind your own business or else. What's your responsibility here? Do you have one? Should you consider your safety, too, if you decide to get involved?

③ Following a highly competitive basketball game at another school (your team won), you and your friends are piling into a car to drive home. You notice that there are eight riders but only six seat belts. If you don't go with them, you'll be left alone, and you might be in danger of being bullied (or worse) by students from the other school. If you do go with them, someone—maybe you—will be riding without a seat belt. What might you do? What might you do in the future to prevent situations like this one from happening?

④ You're baby-sitting late one night when you hear someone tampering with the lock on the back door. Then you hear a back window slide open. You reach for the phone line, but the phone is dead. You could slip out the front door and run to a neighbor's house, but there are four children sleeping upstairs. What might you do? What might you do in the future to prevent situations like this one from happening?

⑤ Your best friend's father has a gun rack and keeps loaded guns in the house for protection. You know that your friend sometimes sneaks one of his father's guns and shoots birds. Should you say something to your friend? To your friend's father? To your parents? Or should you mind your own business? What other options might you have?

⑥ You're hiking with some friends who start climbing in a slick, dangerous, rocky area. You get a "gut feeling" of uneasiness about it. If you refuse to go with them, they'll make fun of you and they might leave you behind. Besides, you've brought rock climbing equipment along, and you know how to use it. Your feeling of uneasiness is probably just your imagination . . . at least, that's what you tell yourself. Do you "trust your gut" or not? What might you do?

## Activities

**WRITE IN YOUR JOURNAL**<sup>2</sup> about safety issues that concern you. What worries you most at home, at school, in your neighborhood, in your community, in your nation, in the world?

*Variation:* Choose one of your worries and turn it into a project. Set goals for yourself so you can turn your project into a reality.<sup>3</sup>

**WRITE A JINGLE ABOUT SAFETY** and set it to music. Make a recording of your jingle and ask a local radio station to play it as a public service announcement (PSA) for a day, week, or month. Or perform it over your school's PA system.

**CREATE A FLYER ABOUT POISON SAFETY** to educate others about the dangers.

1. **Contact your local poison control center** (look in the front of your phone book under Emergency Numbers). Or call information (411) and ask for the number. (If your town doesn't have a poison control center, getting one started would be a great project for your class, club, or school.) Ask for information (statistics) on poisonings in your town, city, or state. The poison control center might have a pamphlet or news release to send you.

2. **Write your flyer.** Include:

- ☒ the telephone number of the poison control center
- ☒ some of the statistics provided by the poison control center
- ☒ advice on what to say when reporting a possible poisoning (give your name, phone number, and address where you are; give the name of the substance—have the container in front of you when you call; the amount taken; the person's current condition or symptoms—vomiting? difficulty breathing? other symptoms?)
- ☒ safety tips on storing poisonous or potentially harmful substances (cleaning supplies, medications, solvents, etc.) in the home.

<sup>2</sup> See "Endurance," pages 88, 89, and 92, for journaling resources.

<sup>3</sup> See "Purpose," pages 195–197, for goal-setting steps and "Responsibility," page 227, for planning steps.