



HSE SOUTH, HEALTH PROMOTION & IMPROVEMENT

HEALTHY HABITS

PARENTS | POST PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Key health information for teenagers - a guide for parents/guardians

Parents have a huge influence in guiding teenagers to make positive health choices. It is amazing and rewarding to watch your teenager grow up and to help them learn to be independent. This guide contains information on physical and mental health, including the importance of relaxation and down time, a balanced diet and adequate sleep. Good communication, problem solving skills and self esteem in teenagers all promote wellbeing by enabling your teenager to express their needs and make healthy personal choices.

It can often be difficult to know which health messages are correct and which sources of health information are reliable and trustworthy. This guide provides you with the most up-to-date Irish health guidelines for teenagers, issued by both the HSE Department of Health Promotion & Improvement and the Department of Health.



“It’s so hard to know what information is correct and up to date, it’s always changing and there is lots of misinformation”

Confused Parent!



KEEPING ACTIVE

Vital for Physical & Mental Wellbeing

Being physically active is a core component of good health and wellbeing. Physical activity is essential for physical, psychological, emotional, and social health, and should be seen as part of everyone's daily lifestyle.

Research tells us that teenagers (particularly teenage girls) can lose interest in physical activity. Between school, homework, social activities and even part-time jobs, they are juggling a lot of interests and responsibilities.

By supporting and encouraging teenagers to take part in regular physical activity we can help them to develop good habits, which will prove invaluable throughout the rest of their lives.

The National Guidelines on Physical Activity for Ireland recommend that children and young people (up to 18 years) should be active at a moderate to vigorous intensity* **for at least 60 minutes a day every day**. This should include muscle-strengthening, flexibility and bone-strengthening exercises three times a week. 60 minutes a day can be accumulated by doing a number of shorter sessions during the day.

** for more information on the meaning of "moderate and vigorous intensity" means, go to the National Physical Activity Guidelines. See resources below.*

RESOURCES



- Tips on how to improve young people's activity levels www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/teaching-your-children-to-be-active.html
- The START campaign aims to support families to take small steps to eating healthier food and becoming more active www.safefood.net/start
- HSE Physical Activity Guidelines www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/heal/physical-activity-guidelines/



Key Points for Parents



Being active does not have to be organised or structured 'Sport'. All physical activity counts towards the 60 minutes activity per day.

Encourage your teenager to get active through active recreation such as hiking or skateboarding, walking, running, cycling or swimming.

Join in the fun and be active with your teenager. This will also help you get your own daily recommended 30 minutes activity on least 5 days a week or 150 minutes a week for adults.

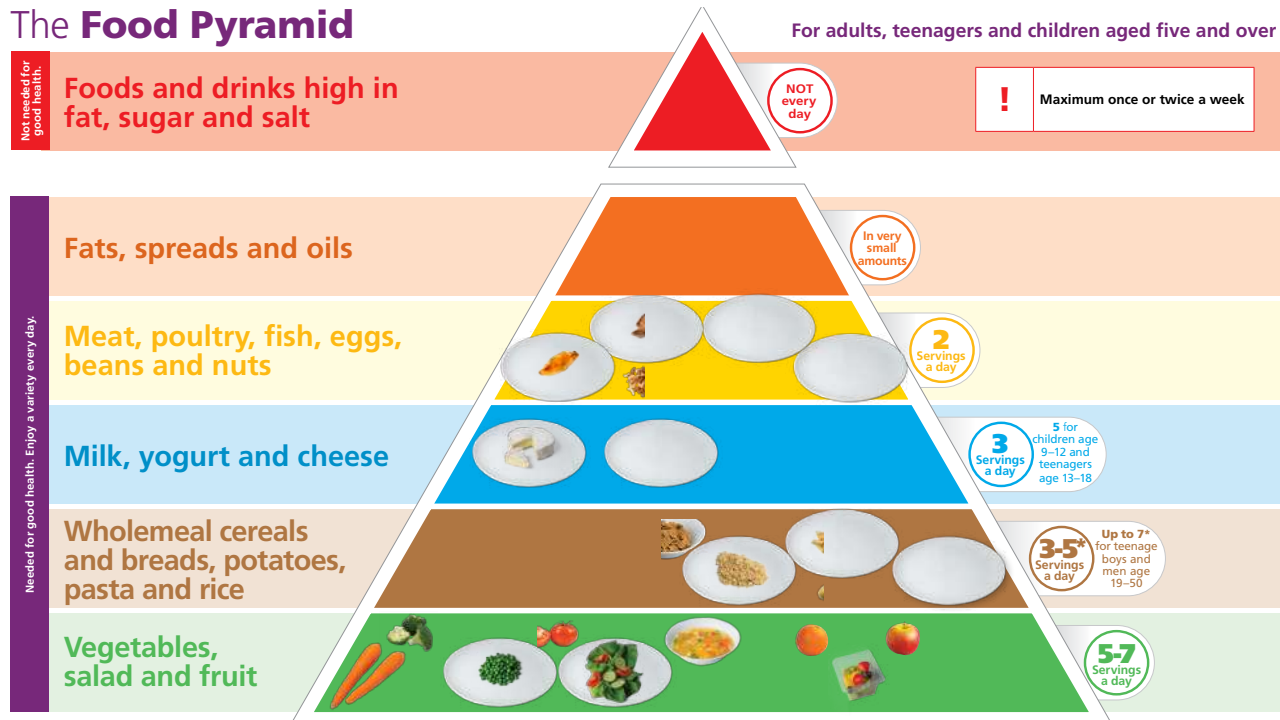
Parents should give teenagers control over how they decide to be physically active. They want to make their own decisions, so give them a choice. What they do is not important, they just need to be active.

Get Ireland Active
Promoting Physical Activity in Ireland



EATING WELL “What’s for dinner?”

The Food Pyramid

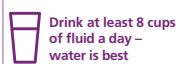


*Daily Servings Guide – wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta and rice

Active	Child (5-12)	Teenager (13-18)	Adult (19-50)	Adult (51+)	Inactive	Teenager (13-18)	Adult (19-50)	Adult (51+)
	3-4	4	4-5	3-4		3	3-4	3
	3-5	5-7	5-7	4-5		4-5	4-6	4

There is no guideline for inactive children as it is essential that all children are active.

Source: Department of Health, December 2016.



Get Active!

To maintain a healthy weight adults need at least 30 minutes a day of moderate activity on 5 days a week (or 150 minutes a week); children need to be active at a moderate to vigorous level for at least 60 minutes every day.

Healthy eating is about getting the correct amount of nutrients – protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals that are needed to maintain both good health and a healthy weight. In order to help with food choices, the food pyramid guide is used. Foods that contain the same type of nutrients are grouped together on each of the shelves of the pyramid. Following the food pyramid will guide you towards the right balance of nutritious foods within your calorie range. While the food pyramid can be used as a guide, it is important that teenagers eat according to their growth rate and physical activity levels.

Teenagers begin to make their own choices about food and parents have less influence on what they eat, so it's important they have the right information to make healthy food choices.

RESOURCES



- Your Guide to Healthy Eating www2.hse.ie/healthy-eating-active-living/nutrition/
- Nutrition information for teenagers www.safefood.net/family-health/teens
- Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute. Nutrition information for teenagers www.indi.ie/all-food-facts-and-fact-sheets.html#Teenagers%20Health

Key Points for Parents



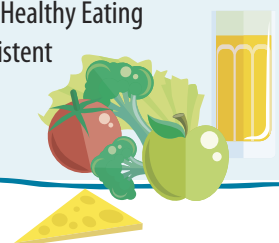
Eating a balanced and varied diet based on the food pyramid will provide all the nutrients that are needed to support rapid growth and development during teenage years.

Children often feel hungrier and eat more as they begin puberty.

Foods and drinks that are high in sugar, fat and salt include sweets, chocolate, crisps, biscuits, cakes and fizzy drinks. These foods have little nutritional value and should be kept to a minimum.

Replace sugary drinks with milk or water.

Be aware of the school's Healthy Eating Policy and try to be consistent at home with the key points of the policy.



GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

SEXUAL WELLBEING

Sexual wellbeing is defined as a good balance of emotional, physical and social wellness in relation to sexual health and is linked to your overall general health. Children experience many physical and emotional changes during puberty.

As your child enters the teenage years and puberty, they start to use other sources of information, such as their friends and the internet for answers to sensitive topics. Children are exposed to the topics of relationships and sexual wellbeing through the internet, gaming, magazines, music, videos and TV, often getting inappropriate and misleading information.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is taught throughout their whole school life as part of Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). It is important, that your teenager knows that they can also come to YOU whenever they have questions. They should feel comfortable talking to you, as their parent/guardian, regardless of the topic. Feeling heard and respected is so important for them.

In addition to what they are taught in school, teenagers still need the opportunity to talk to you as their parent/guardian about relationships and sexuality and growing up.

This is not a one-off chat but an on-going process.

Give your older child/teenager attention, actively listen and show interest, some topics can be difficult to discuss so try to avoid judging or being critical.

Find out about the schools RSE policy and get involved if the school is updating it.

Make yourself aware of what topics your teenager is covering in school and provide opportunities to discuss them at home.

RESOURCES

- There are a wide range of publications on www2.hse.ie/services/healthpromotion (under the search publications tool bar) on relationships and sexual wellbeing.
- www.Mysexualhealth.ie
- www.sexualwellbeing.ie
- b4udecide.ie



MENTAL WELLBEING

Promoting Positive Mental Health - As Important As Physical Health

Teenage years are a time of significant life transitions, physical changes, emotional and intellectual demands. Social media also becomes very much part of their lives at this stage and research shows that this can have a negative impact on their mental health. The changes that occur during this time can manifest in behaviours that can be challenging and hard to understand, leaving parents feeling unsure as to what is part of typical adolescent behaviour and what may cause more concern. Sometimes it can be hard to tell the difference.

As a parent you play an important role in supporting your child's mental health. You can promote good mental health by the things you do, say, and the environment you create at home.

RESOURCES



- Mental Health and Young People.
www.mentalhealthireland.ie
- Information on mental health support services for children.
www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/mental-health/supports-for-young-people.html
- www2.hse.ie/mental-health/
- www.spunout.ie



Key Points for Parents



Focus on strength: Look at things that your child does well.

Ask questions about feelings: It's OK for your child to feel how they feel (eg angry, sad, worried, embarrassed). The feelings can be mild, moderate, or strong. They aren't right or wrong, or good or bad. To help your child name and calm their feelings, ask questions about what they're feeling.

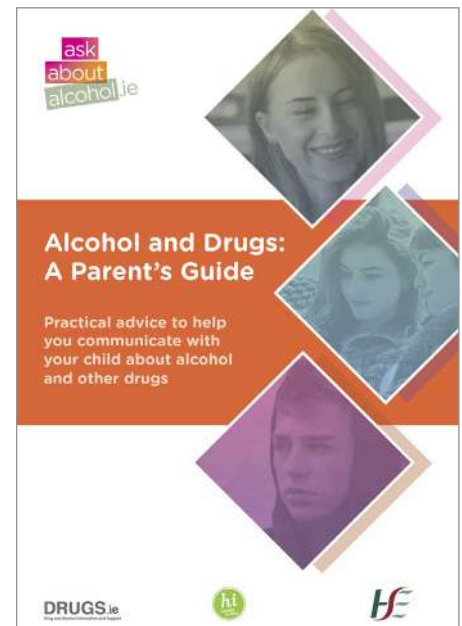
Listen and show empathy: When your child tells you what they are feeling, try to put yourself in their place. Accept what they are feeling and show empathy with the tone of your voice and the expressions on your face.

Strong and loving relationships can have a direct and positive influence on teenage mental health.

Physical health is very much linked to mental health. Encourage teenagers to stay active, eat well, sleep, well and avoid alcohol and other drugs.

Familiarise yourself with what is happening in school around mental health and wellbeing and provide opportunities to discuss at home.

DRUGS & ALCOHOL



Keeping Your Teenagers Safe

It is internationally recommended that children and young people should not drink or take drugs until early to mid twenties as their bodies and brains are still developing. However, in Ireland despite the legal age for alcohol use being 18 years, the average age for those who start to experiment with substances is around the age of 15 years of age.

It can be difficult for parents to prevent children from engaging in this activity. However, the longer that young people can delay drinking and drug use the less likely it is that problems will occur in later life. Teenagers and young people's attitudes to alcohol and other drugs are influenced by many things - friends, social media, advertising and, not least, the Irish drinking culture. Fortunately, in spite of these many influences, parents remain the **single strongest influence** on their child's substance use behaviours.

Key Points for Parents

- Build a close relationship with your child.
- Talk openly and honestly about the risks of using alcohol & other drugs.
- Set boundaries and stick to them.
- Know what they are doing when out.
- Don't give alcohol to under 18 year olds.
- If you drink set a good example by taking a low risk approach.
- Be aware of the schools Substance Use Policy.

RESOURCES

- HSE Drugs & Alcohol Helpline. This confidential service has both a Freephone Helpline (1800 459 459) and an email support service (helpline@hse.ie) www.drugs.ie
- HSE 'Alcohol and Drugs: A Parent's Guide' aimed at parents, guardians and others who care for children. www.drugsandalcohol.ie/29435/1/Alcohol_and_drugs_a_parents_guide.pdf
- Information for parents on drugs & alcohol. www2.hse.ie/wellbeing/alcohol/young-people-and-alcohol/
- Ask about alcohol.ie is a website dedicated to information on alcohol. www.askaboutalcohol.ie



SLEEP

Getting Enough Sleep To Stay Healthy And Be Well Rested

It is important to get enough sleep no matter how old you are. Sleep helps the body stay healthy and makes it easier to deal with life's challenges. Sleep is proven to help memory and focus as well as improve management of stress and anxiety.

Teen Sleep Tips...

AVOID

- ✗ Any type of screens an hour before bedtime
- ✗ Caffeine or energy drinks
- ✗ High intensity exercise in the hour before bedtime
- ✗ Sugary foods or heavy (missing text)



TRY

- ✓ Reading a book or magazine
- ✓ Warm milk, water or herbal tea
- ✓ Invest in an alarm clock rather than using the alarm clock on your phone.
- ✓ Exercise during the day & have an hour of relaxation time before bed



RESOURCES

- Shake off the sleep monster by the HSE gives you different tips on how to get sleep. www2.hse.ie/healthy-you/shake-off-the-sleep-monster.html



GENERAL HEALTH FOR PARENTS

HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOURSELVES

We all want to get off the couch to set a healthier routine but with so much information out there, it can be hard to know where to start! With some simple easy steps, you can learn how to create a new healthy habit, whether that is eating better, getting more physically active, or learning how to take care of your mental wellbeing.



The Let's Get Set campaign is focussed on the following themes:

Creating a new habit - creating new habits can be hard. It takes time and there are bound to be bumps on the road.

Getting Active - Being physically active is beneficial for your physical and overall wellbeing. It can help you deal with anxiety and stress.

Eating Well - Healthy eating is really important to look after our general health and keep ourselves well. By nourishing our bodies and minds, we can develop a better connection between the food we eat and how we feel and positively impact our physical and mental wellbeing.

Minding Your Mood - minding your mood or your mental wellbeing can allow you to enjoy activities you take part in, work productively, cope with normal stresses in life, and realise your own potential.

Supports - a wide range of supports and resources on eating well, keeping active and looking after your mental wellbeing.



RESOURCES

- Let's Get Set Campaign
www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/healthy-ireland/
- Parenting Support
www.tusla.ie/services/family-community-support/parenting-24-seven/



SELF CARE FOR PARENTS Do We Prioritise It?

As we raise our children and juggle everything else in our busy lives, we can forget to mind ourselves and self-care can become lower down the priority list.

Self-care allows us to check in with how we are feeling and look after ourselves. It should not be seen as a luxury but rather an essential part of our lives.

“

Self Care

Activities and practices that we deliberately plan and choose to engage in on a regular basis to enhance and maintain our wellbeing.

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RESOURCES



- Minding Your Wellbeing. Five 20 minute videos sessions.
www2.hse.ie/healthy-you/minding-your-wellbeing-programme.html
- The Five Ways to Wellbeing are simple actions to practice each day to maintain or improve our mental health and wellbeing.
www.mentalhealthireland.ie/five-ways-to-wellbeing/

Key Points for Parents

Good self-care is key to improved mood and reduced anxiety. It's also key to a good relationship with oneself and others.



The **FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING** are simple actions to practice each day to maintain or improve our mental health and wellbeing



Give
Your time,
your words,
your presence



BE ACTIVE
DO WHAT YOU CAN,
ENJOY WHAT YOU DO,
MOVE YOUR MOOD



KEEP LEARNING
EMBRACE NEW
EXPERIENCES,
SEE OPPORTUNITIES,
SURPRISE YOURSELF



CONNECT
TALK & LISTEN,
BE THERE,
FEEL CONNECTED



TAKE NOTICE
REMEMBER
THE SIMPLE
THINGS THAT
GIVE YOU JOY



CONTACT DETAILS

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