

Healthy Diets and Physically Fit Youth

The increase in overweight and obesity among U.S. children and adolescents has been called

America's newest epidemic. Overweight and obese teens face immediate health problems, such as high cholesterol, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, insulin resistance, polycystic ovary syndrome, as well as emotional issues. Excess weight in adolescence carried into adulthood also predisposes youth for serious adult health risks such as coronary disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, some types of cancer and osteoarthritis of the weight-bearing joints. The following data are from the 2007 Tennessee Youth Risk Behavioral Survey (TN YRBS) unless otherwise indicated.

TENNESSEE DATA

- The 2007 TN YRBS reported that 16.9% of high school students were overweight or at the 95th percentile for body mass index, and 18.1% were at risk for becoming overweight or at the 85th percentile but below the 95th percentile for body mass index.
- More high school males (21.6%) were overweight compared to high school females (12.0%).
- More African -American high school students (19.6%) were overweight compared to their white (16.2%) and Hispanic/Latino counterparts (15.5%).
- Approximately 11.5% of high school students reported fasting, and 6.2% reported using diet pills, powders, or liquids to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight during the past 30 days.
- Rather than being physically active in their spare time, studies on how teens spend their time indicate that watching television and playing video or computer games is the mainstay of activity. A large proportion (38.3%) of high school students reported watching TV for at least three hours or more a day on an average school day. From among the same population, 23.1 % reported playing video or computer games or using a computer for something that is not school work on an average school day.
- Sixty-one per cent of high school students reported that they had exercised to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight during the past 30 days.

BEST PRACTICES

Nutrition

- Parents – Family knowledge and habits regarding a healthy diet are the earliest steps to preventing adolescent overweight and obesity. Teens and parents need more consumer awareness about reasonable food and beverage portion sizes. Pregnant and parenting teens need education about the potentially protective effect of breastfeeding against the development of later obesity in their infants.
- Schools – Schools can promote healthful dietary patterns by ensuring that school lunches are healthy and attractive to teens and by providing healthier snack options.
- Communities – Communities can seek demonstration grants to address the lack of access to and availability of healthy affordable foods in inner cities.

Physical Activity

- Parents – Parents and older siblings can model participation in physical activity and/or support their teen's pursuit of athletic activity.
- Schools – Where it has been cut, schools can restore physical education to the daily schedule. Where physical education classes are still available, schools can devote more class time to actual participation and increase the levels of intensity.
- Communities – Communities can support youth sports and recreation programs that offer a range of activities that are accessible and attractive to teens. Communities can be creative in zoning and transportation planning to make it convenient, safe and attractive for young people to walk and ride bicycles.

Tune In

- Parents – Parents can create an atmosphere at home that promotes self-respect for all members. Children and youth can be encouraged to eat in response to appropriate body signals. Parents can serve as a role model to children and youth by eating healthy and being physically active.

- Schools – Schools can ensure an atmosphere conducive to all students feeling respected and encouraged to make healthy choices, regardless of physical size or weight. Teachers and other school staff can encourage students to tune in to their own body signals so they eat in response to appropriate cues. Schools can provide opportunities for teachers/staff to model healthy eating and increased physical activity. A pleasant school environment and an adequate amount of time for students to enjoy school breakfast and school lunch can be provided. Schools can ensure an environment that fosters healthy attitudes regarding physical activity.
- Communities – Communities can build an atmosphere that is conducive to citizens feeling respected, regardless of size or weight. Citizens can be encouraged to tune in to their own body signals so they eat only when hungry. Community support for overweight prevention and treatment programs can be encouraged.

2010 Objectives

INCREASE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- By 2010, increase the proportion of high school students who engage in vigorous physical activity three or more days per week for 20 minutes or more per occasion to 85%, from the 2005 rate of 62%.

REDUCE OBESITY

- By 2010, reduce the proportion of high school students who are overweight or obese to 5.0%, from the 2005 baseline of 14.6%.

Websites

Action for Healthy Kids
www.actionforhealthykids.org

National Eating Disorders Association
www.nationaleatingdisorders.org

Tennessee Association for Health, Physical Education,
 Recreation and Dance
www.tahperd.us

Tennessee Department of Education
 School Nutrition Programs, Office of School Health
www.state.tn.us/education

Tennessee Department of Health,
Nutrition Services/WIC, Maternal & Child Health,
Community Services, Minority Health
www.2.state.tn.us/health

Tennessee Extension Service
www.utextension.utk.edu/fcs
Tennessee Healthy Weight Network
<http://tnhealthyweight.org/>

Tennessee Governor's Council on Physical
Fitness and Health
www.physicalfitness.org/tennessee.html

Tennessee GetFitTN
<http://www.getfittn.com/>

Tennessee On The Move
www.americaonthemove.org/tn