



## *Good mental health for teens - the basics!*

### Did you know that what you eat can affect how you feel?

What if everything you ate and drank had the power to either make you feel really well, calm, strong, or energetic? What if other foods could make you feel tired, agitated or unhappy? Which would you choose? Which foods would you suspect would be the best to help you to feel good? 'Junk foods' such as fizzy drinks and chocolate bars do seem to make people feel good yet they are supposed to be unhealthy which is quite confusing in itself. These foods can make people feel energetic from the sugar rush, but only briefly. This is called a short-term gain. When these sorts of food products make you gain excess weight, give you spots or deprive you of nutrients in the long-term, you might feel a bit less appreciative towards them. Some foods, such as chocolate actually activate the reward centre in the brain and make you want more of them! Sneaky!

### Exercise

Exercise doesn't only make you look and feel great but it can even help you think through things in your mind. Exercise where you use both sides of your body evenly -such as cycling, walking or running activate both sides of your brain<sup>1</sup>. Scientists think we use the right side of our brains to think creatively and the left to think logically so when we activate the two sides by exercising in this way it can help us problem solve or gain perspective! It doesn't matter if the pace is fast or slow, just keep an even rhythm. Additionally, any kind of exercise helps improve memory and concentration!

### Team work

It doesn't matter if this is voluntary work, playing in an orchestra, being part of a theatre group or playing a sport such as soccer – if its team work everyone has the same goal. It's incredibly important to be immersed in this sort of social activity because **team work connects you with people who share your interests and who are supportive of one another**. This doesn't mean you aren't allowed alone time. Heaps of people enjoy the tranquility of working uninterrupted or 'zoning out' to collect their thoughts so both are important.

### Screen time

Enjoying TV, social media, surfing the internet or playing video games is not necessarily an addiction. But if you are spending long hours playing video games you might spend too much time on the couch, becoming more sedentary and socially reclusive. You might sometimes neglect chores or homework, and you might fail to develop the ability to entertain yourself in a more functional way. Be aware that some games have very violent themes and the internet is underregulated. **Make sure you are in control of your tech** by setting a two hour maximum daily limit on games and set a timer. If facebook, twitter or instagram are bothering you - switch them off!

**There's more on page 2!**

# Are you getting enough ZZZs?

The lives of teenagers are very demanding. Not only do you attend full time school and then do all your after school activities but you are growing - FAST! Just because you are busy doesn't stop you needing good quality sleep. **Teens need between 9 and 9½ hours sleep each night<sup>2</sup>.** Keep a routine bedtime and set the alarm for the same time each day. Don't over sleep. Turn off your phone/ipad/laptop and don't read in bed. Bed is for sleeping and it will be easier for you to sleep deeply if the room is very dark and not too hot.

## Be yourself

What do you enjoy? How do differing activities make you feel? Take time to notice how you feel doing different things. **Look for as many opportunities as you can to focus on your authentic interests** and on activities that make you feel good physically, emotionally and mentally. Same with people, make sure they bring out your best side and that you have healthy friendships.

## Get some respect!

We already know you are awesome – you are reading this Healthy Balance download after all! No one can be YOU the way you can so you must look after yourself. This way you can be your own biggest supporter! When you were a little kid, your parents inputted a lot into making sure you were physically well. Now you are getting older, far more of this responsibility is yours. As well as exercising and eating a sensible diet, keeping clean, keeping your appearance neat and tidy and being respectful to others and are all good ways to **show people you respect yourself** and in turn, will build your confidence as people respond differently to you.

## Reach out

Even if you feel incredibly shy sometimes, make an effort to say 'Hi' to people and ask them how they are doing. You'll be amazed how quickly connections form when you are genuinely interested in the people around you and you **listen to how others are doing**. If you already have mates, get chatting. Find out how many things you have in common. If you are having a tough time with friendships, being bullied, worrying about your relationship with your parent or guardian, or even being harmed in some way, please speak out. There are people who actually want to help you and it is very important you find your way to them. Consider talking to an adult you trust such as a parent or teacher at school, or call a helpline designed for these sorts of issues. It is important that you get the support you need. There is a good list of support services here:

<https://www.healthy-balance.co.uk/kids-mental-health-resources>

### References:

- (1) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5994583/>
- (2) <https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/specialties/sleep-disorder-center/sleep-in-adolescents>
- (3) <https://www.parentingscience.com/video-game-addiction.html>