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Teenage Years: Coming of Age

The teenage years are characterized by personal and environmental challenges that have both direct and indirect effects on teens' food, fitness, and lifestyle habits. With so much to worry about during adolescence (not to mention being on an emotional roller coaster), it's no surprise that consuming adequate (but not excessive) calories, getting enough key nutrients in the diet, and incorporating enough physical activity to optimize body weight and health are low (if at all on) on most teens' priority list.

If you take a close look at the state of America, it's apparent that overwhelming amounts of highly processed, high calorie, nutrient-poor, and highly palatable foods and beverages are available 24/7. According to a recent study by the Federal Trade Commission, an estimated \$1.6 billion was spent marketing food and beverage products to children and adolescents in 2006. The availability of and heavy push by manufacturers to consume convenience foods (including snack foods and sugar-sweetened beverages) and fast foods no doubt sets teens up to over consume calories, fat, sugar, and sodium and under consume fiber and valuable vitamins and minerals; this in turn makes it difficult for teens to enjoy optimal health and disease prevention that can pay dividends as they grow into young adults.

Adding to the less than healthful food environment in which teens live is the fact that they spend exorbitant amounts of time indulging in "entertainment media" (watching television, socializing on a computer, or playing video games) and texting or talking on their cell phones. Teens' increasingly sedentary lifestyle, coupled with a mostly toxic food environment, contributes to unhealthy weight and body fat gain, and increased disease risk.

In this talk, geared toward health professionals, Zied reviewed teen's current weight and health status. She provided the latest statistics on the prevalence of overweight and obesity, elevated blood lipids and blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and metabolic syndrome —diet-related diseases and conditions that are becoming more and more prevalent among today's teens.

Zied discussed teens' typical food and activity habits, noting trends over the last few decades as well as current snacking, beverage, and fast food habits. She also reviewed the latest findings from the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2009; teens' self-reported habits related to weight control (including fasting), food and beverage intake (including alcoholic beverages), and physical activity. Zied also provided a brief overview of teens' current physical activity and media use patterns.

Although teens' calorie and nutrient needs vary depending on age, gender, and other variables, key food groups and the nutrients each provide (including shortfall nutrients for teens) were discussed, with a close look at specific whole foods that are vital to optimizing

teens' dietary patterns and overall health and wellness. Current physical activity guidelines for teens were also discussed.

Zied ended her presentation with suggestions to practitioners who work with teens and their parents to help them bridge the huge divide between what and how teens eat and live and what teens need to eat and do to optimize their health and quality of life during adolescence. Educating parents about authoritative, positive parenting, making more time for family meals, and helping them identify red flags for disordered eating, eating disorders, and obesity/overweight were discussed, and resources for teens and their families were provided.

Selected references and resources:

Prevalence of high BMI in US children and adolescents, 2007 – 2008
Ogden et al, 2010, *JAMA*, 303(3):242-9.

<http://bit.ly/bYHyhD>

Does hunger and satiety drive eating anymore?

Popkin BM & Duffey KJ, 2010, *Am J Clin Nut.* 91;1342-7.

<http://bit.ly/bT4L0K>

Patterns of beverage use across the lifecycle

Popkin, BM. 2010, *Physio and Behav*, 100(1):4-9.

<http://bit.ly/bfjadx>

US adolescents and mypyramid: associations between fast-food consumption and lower likelihood of meeting recommendations

Sebastian et al, 2009, *J Am Diet Assoc*, 109(2):226-35.

<http://bit.ly/cdXYx6>

USDA, 2008, What We Eat in America, NHANES 2005-2006

<http://bit.ly/aWeSHn>

CDC, 2009, National Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

<http://bit.ly/9iz4Z2>

Project Eat, U of Minn School of Public Health

Link: <http://bit.ly/b7cTH6>

Informing family approaches to eating disorder prevention: perspectives of those who have been there

Loth KA et al, 2009, *Int J Eat Disord*, 42(2):146-52.

<http://bit.ly/dmedsE>

USDA Weight Management & Obesity Resources List: <http://bit.ly/1afAlG>

National Eating Disorder Association Parent Toolkit: <http://bit.ly/9jXvPx>

Weight Control Information Network: Take Charge of Your Health! A Guide for Teenagers: <http://bit.ly/cCzzcX>

Fitsmi.com: for Teen girls with weight struggles & their mothers: <http://www.fitsmi.com/>

Alliance for a Healthier Generation's *empowerMe* movement—to make healthy lifestyles cool for tweens & teens: <http://empowerme2b.org/>