

# LIFEGUARD YOUTH DEVELOPMENT@

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GUARD YOUR HEART

GUARD YOUR MIND

GUARD YOUR BODY

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## Diet, Exercise, Body Image



Diet, exercise, body image, and weight; all issues among our youth. Most adolescents do not eat the recommended amount of fruit (1 1/2 cups) and veggies (2 1/2 cups) per day, and about one-third fail to meet the current recommendations of three or more sessions of moderate to vigorous physical activity a week. Inexpensive fast food, the availability of foods high in sugar, salt and fat in both school and at home, sometimes unsafe neighborhoods where youth are not free to go outside and play, and an increasing amount of time spent watching television or playing video games have contributed to the overweight status of many children and adolescents. Regardless of their actual weight, some adolescents, and in particular female adolescents, have an intense desire to be thin leading in some cases to an eating disorder.

**What are body image and eating disorders??** Body image refers to how an individual views his or her body shape and weight. Individuals who have a poor body image may believe that they are overweight, even if they are not. Eating disorders occur when a person has a poor body image and does dangerous things to control his or her weight, such as not eating or vomiting after eating. In the most severe cases, eating disorders can cause death.

**Eating disorders can be prevented;** eating disorders arise from a variety of physical, emotional, social, and familial issues, all of which need to be addressed for effective prevention and treatment. While eating disorders may begin with preoccupations with food and weight, they are most often about much more than food.

**Media, body image and eating disorders:** Media images that help to create cultural definitions of beauty and attractiveness are often acknowledged as being among those factors contributing to the rise of eating disorders.

**Seeking treatment;** because eating disorders are serious health conditions that can be both physically and emotionally destructive, professional help is always recommended. If not identified or treated in their early stages, eating disorders can become chronic, debilitating, and even life-threatening.

### Fast Facts about Eating Disorders & Negative Self-body Image

- Up to 10 million people in America have an eating disorder. • 25-30% of Americans struggle with emotional eating.
- Eating disorders are actually psychiatric illnesses not unlike depression or anxiety. • Eating disorders are more common in females between the ages of 15-23. • Between 10-15% of anorexia cases die as a result of complications. That's nearly 1 million people! • An estimated four out of every 10 people with anorexia will make a full recovery.
- Anorexic patients weigh at least 15% below the normal weight for their height. [www.justsayyes.org](http://www.justsayyes.org)



### It's 8:00pm, do you know where your children are, or who they are talking to?

These days, you may not. Today's teens are far more technology savvy than most parents are, and they use technology such as computers and cell phones to obtain information and maintain a constant and varied social network of friends. Added to the changing structure of today's families, kids depend more upon peers for information and support than ever before. Many relatively innocuous teen trends, such as day-glo hair, body piercing and alternative music arise from and are supported by kids communication with other kids. But not all of the information and support that kids get from their peers is positive. Many websites that offer teens a sense of belonging and community promote dangerous behaviors. **Information about two such sites are; [www.eatingdisordershelppguide.com/pro-ana.html](http://www.eatingdisordershelppguide.com/pro-ana.html) (Pro-Anorexia) and [www.eatingdisordershelppguide.com/pro-mia.html](http://www.eatingdisordershelppguide.com/pro-mia.html) (Pro-bulimia).** How can parents guard against a teen venturing into pro-mia or pro-ana websites. While it is virtually impossible to do this, you can combat the power of such information in several ways:



- Stay informed. Educate yourself about these websites and then educate your teen about some of the erroneous info on these sites.
- Look for reputable websites on eating disorders to share. (some sources below)
- Be a role model for healthy eating. Spend time as a family cooking and eating together.

### Tips for Parents, Educators, Coaches & others who Work with Young People

(8 listed here, visit [www.guardyourself.org](http://www.guardyourself.org) for additional tips)

- ♦ **Build self-esteem.** The most important gift adults can give children is **self-esteem**. When adults show children that they value and love them unconditionally, children can withstand the perils of childhood and adolescence with fewer scars and traumas. **Self-esteem** is a universal vaccine that can immunize a youngster from eating problems, body image distortion, exercise abuse and many other problems. Providing self-esteem is the responsibility of both parents. *Girls especially need support and validation from their fathers.*
- ♦ **Encourage open communication.** Teach children how to communicate. Encourage children to talk openly and honestly and really listen to them. Let them know that their opinions and feelings are cared for and valued. Being encouraged to assert themselves helps young people say no to pressures to conform. Feeling loved and confident allows them to accept that they are unique individuals.
- ♦ **Encourage critical thinking.** The only sure antidote to the tendency to conform to the powerful seduction of the media and peer pressure is the ability to think critically. Parents have to encourage critical thinking early, and educators have to continue the mission. ***We need to teach kids how to think, not what to think,*** and to encourage them to disagree, challenge, brainstorm alternatives, etc.
- ♦ **Discourage the idea that a particular diet or body size will automatically lead to happiness and fulfillment.**
- ♦ **Don't use food as a reward or punishment.** It sets food up as a potential weapon for control.
- ♦ **Don't support pornography or other "institutions" that cast women as objects for the pleasure of men, objects without personal integrity.**
- ♦ **Teach children about good relationships and how to deal with difficulties when they arise.**
- ♦ **Examine your own attitudes, beliefs, prejudices and behaviors about food, weight, body image, physical appearance, health & exercise.**

***Love, accept, acknowledge, appreciate, and value your children out-loud no matter what they weigh.***

Brief Research to results: [www.Childtrends.org](http://www.Childtrends.org); [www.eatingdisordershelppguide.com](http://www.eatingdisordershelppguide.com). Additional resources: [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org); [www.cdc.gov/yrbbs](http://www.cdc.gov/yrbbs) [info@NationalEatingDisorders.org](mailto:info@NationalEatingDisorders.org); [girlshealth.gov](http://girlshealth.gov).

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