

Ask the Expert at Stony Brook University Hospital

My 14-year-old son is overweight and frustrated that people make fun of his weight. He now wants to lose weight. What do you recommend?

Teenage obesity has reached alarming levels in the U.S. Studies show obese teens are experiencing adult diseases that can shorten their life spans, such as: cardiovascular disease, hypertension, severe depression and diabetes. Fortunately, the adolescent human body is quite resilient. Many of obesity's harmful effects can be reversed with weight loss and maintenance of a healthy diet.

The American Council on Exercise encourages parents to be role models, making exercise a routine part of their family's day. The earlier a parent incorporates physical activities into their child's daily routine, the more likely that child will stay active as they age. Early on, children should be included in household tasks such as washing the car and raking leaves. As your child grows, plan activities with them such as bicycling, walking, or shooting baskets. Encourage them to invite their friends. At least one hour a day, five days a week should be devoted to continuous physical activity.

Combating obesity also requires proper eating habits. Teens need balanced meals containing fruits, vegetables, and low-fat or non-fat foods. Reducing high calorie foods and snacks, especially fructose sweetened sodas, is essential. Many of my



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patients have found it helpful to discuss alternatives to their favorite high calorie foods with a nutritionist.

The Department of Pediatrics at Stony Brook University Hospital offers two programs to help children and adolescents reduce obesity by strongly emphasizing healthier eating habits and routine physical exercise. Dr. Peter Morelli runs the *Pediatric Preventative Cardiovascular Risk Program*, a comprehensive program providing medical evaluation, nutritional counseling and exercise for school age children and young adolescents. The Division of Adolescent Medicine offers

older adolescents and young adults individual evaluations, counseling and support services to assist in lifestyle modifications.

At times, adolescents set extreme weight loss goals and experiment with unhealthy weight loss measures. This can lead to eating disorders such as Anorexia Nervosa or Bulimia Nervosa. To prevent this, meet with your child's physician and discuss your child's weight loss goals. Their physician should regularly follow your child's progress to ensure healthy weight loss.

For more information about obesity prevention, call Stony Brook University Hospital at (631) 444-4000.

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