Ask an expert: A healthy diet for teenage weight loss

Posted by Bonnie J. Brehm/University of Cincinnati  March 04, 2009 00:00AM

Categories: Impact, Netwellness

Question: I am 13 years old and 5 feet tall. I weigh more than I should (probably around 140-150 lbs). I hate it. I want to weigh around 120 pounds and I keep trying diets, but I always fail. I'm always depressed about my weight. I want to be skinny and healthier, but I am a picky eater. I only eat certain fruits. Will you please help me?

Answer: Regular physical activity and a healthy diet during your teen years are necessary for health now and in the future. Weight loss usually requires changes in daily activities and diet habits.

Physical Activity

• Try to participate in some type of physical activity every day for 30 to 60 minutes.

• Find an activity that you enjoy and then ask a friend or family member to join you in the activity.

Walking, running, swimming and biking are examples of activities that will burn calories, make you feel more energetic and help you to feel better about yourself.

Caloric Intake

In addition to increasing your physical activity, you may need to decrease your calories to lose weight. I suggest that you visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture's MyPyramid site and click on MyPyramid Plan. Then enter your gender, age, weight, height and level of physical activity. You will find the number of calories that you need every day.

To lose weight, you will need to eat less than this amount of calories. But don't eat less than 1,200 calories per day because low-calorie diets will not contain all the nutrients needed by your body. As a teenager who is still growing, you need enough calories and nutrients to meet your body's needs for growth and development.

Healthy Eating

Body weight is only one measure of health. It's important to be within the range of healthy body weight, but it's equally important to:

• Eat a healthy diet with a variety of nutrient-rich foods such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low-fat milk and cheese, and lean meat, poultry and fish.

• Don't skip meals

• If you eat four or five small meals or snacks per day, you may be able to control your appetite better.

• Keeping a food journal and writing down everything that you eat and drink can help you to stay on track.

You can also enter your foods and beverages into the MyPyramid Tracker to...
determine how many calories and nutrients you are eating every day.

Best of luck!