

# Help Prevent Teen Depression Through Good Nutrition

We know we feel our best, physically and emotionally when we are properly nourished. This is probably never truer than for teens. Too much sugar, caffeine, salt and fat can leave them jittery, anxious, “hyper”, and easily aggravated. The resulting plummet in blood sugar after eating a high sugar meal or snack, can cause teens to become sluggish, tired, cranky, and depressed.



It's no surprise that alcohol is a depressant, but did you know that certain nutrient deficiencies such as vitamin D and omega 3-fatty acids are also closely linked to depression?

And are you aware that being overweight — or simply believing they are overweight — might predispose some U.S. teens to suicide attempts? A recent study from the *Journal of Adolescent Health* reports: “Our findings show that both perceived and actual overweight increase risk for suicide attempt.” This statement was made by the lead study author Monica Swahn, Ph.D. The association was as strong for boys as for girls, contrary to what the researchers expected.

This is a major concern since more and more children and youth are becoming overweight and obese. Teens are especially vulnerable because they are still developing and normal changes in weight as well as distorted body image can increase the risk of depression or suicide. Immediate professional intervention is necessary if teens appear to be unduly concerned or overly focused on their weight, even with a perfectly normal BMI. Youth feel very pressured to fit in and to fit certain ideals of beauty defined by their media exposure.

It all begins with the brain chemicals that cause the neurons to communicate - neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine. But these substances, which occur naturally in foods, do more than make neurons fire. They can powerfully affect our moods. Low levels of the chemicals can lead to depression, insomnia and food cravings, while high levels can impart feelings of well-being, and add that healthy glow we envy.

There are important ways parents and responsible members of our community, can encourage good nutrition in teens.

- Talk often with your kids about the health benefits of healthy food and beverage choices. It's important for them to know that eating well helps increase energy, improves mental sharpness, and gives them healthier skin and hair.
- Model healthy eating in the home.
- Encourage drinking of water and 1% or skim milk.
- Keep an abundance of healthy whole foods in the home for hungry teens. If you don't have “junk foods” like chips, candy, sweetened cereals and high calorie pastries around, they will select the healthier options. The more sweets you eat, the more sweets you crave.
- Share family meals often. As difficult as it may be, practice communicating. Even a grunt, an eye roll, or a sigh indicates teens hear you!
- Get involved in your school meals nutrition program. Every parent 's voice counts to the school board.

Never stop promoting healthy nutrition for teens. It can influence their self-esteem, moods, and quality of life.



Reference: [The Journal of Adolescent Health.](#)

