

Teen Health On the Line

Today's teens are markedly **less healthy** than their parents were. Should that concern us? Strong,



confident leadership of our nation tomorrow lies in the health of our teenagers today.

A team at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

looked to see how many students were meeting targets for youth physical activity. They found about one out of 10 U.S. high school students met U.S. targets for both aerobic and muscle strengthening activities set for the federal government's [Healthy People 2020 initiative](#), a list of public health goals.

CDC's studies raise [concerns about the health of U.S. teens](#). Healthy People's goals call for increased efforts to get adolescents moving more and consuming fewer sweet drinks. In a beverage survey of more than 11,000 teens, the CDC said overall, roughly two-thirds of high school students drank at least one sugary beverage a day, including soda, sports drinks like Gatorade and other sweetened beverages.

Empty calories from added sugars and solid fats contribute to [40% of daily calories](#) for children and adolescents aged 2–18 years, affecting the overall quality of their diets. Adolescents drink more full-calorie soda per day than milk. Males aged 12–19 years drink an average of 22 ounces of full-calorie soda per day, more than twice their intake of fluid milk (10 ounces), and females drink an average of 14 ounces of full-calorie soda and only 6 ounces of fluid milk.

Trouble lies in the fact that sugar-sweetened beverages add calories to the diet and often are substituted for healthier beverage choices. And among teens, specifically, sweetened beverage consumption can contribute to weight gain, type 2 diabetes, and metabolic syndrome, a risk factor for diabetes, says the CDC.

In a physical activity study, CDC researchers analyzed data from a school-based survey of youths in grades 9 through 12 (roughly ages 14–19). They looked to see how many students were meeting the 2020 Healthy People targets, which call for 60 minutes of aerobic activity per day, muscle-strengthening activity three days a week and weekly activities that combine both forms of exercise. Get a load of this: The report found that only 15.3 percent of U.S. high school students met the aerobic objective of an hour of exercise a day, 51 percent met the muscle-strengthening objective, but just 12.2 percent met the objective of combining both activities. Boys were much more likely than girls and younger students more likely than older students to meet those targets. The researchers said the findings "justify the need to improve and



increase efforts to promote physical activity among youths," adding that public health efforts should focus on at-risk groups including females, students in upper grades and the obese.

Teen health is on the line! Here are two excellent resources to use in your mission to help teens improve their health :

- [Teens Fight Obesity](#)
- [Rethink Your Drink.](#)

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