

General physical health

What does it mean?

The World Health Organization defines physical health as: “A state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not just the absence of illness or disease”.

This means there are many things that influence our physical health, including things that are out of our control, such as where we live or our financial situations.

Small changes can add up to have a positive impact, so we have provided information and advice on a few key areas to help your young person stay well.

What is it important?

Adolescence is an important period when habits, behaviours and attitudes are being formed. This lays the foundations for lifelong good health.

Staying physically healthy helps adolescents stay emotionally healthy too. Being active, eating and sleeping well helps our bodies cope with stress and fight illness.

Parents and carers can support young people to stay physically well. For example, role modelling healthy behaviours can inspire and encourage young people to do the same.

Sleep

See our [resource on Sleep Hygiene](#) for more information and advice on the importance of sleep and how to help adolescent children improve their sleep.

Nutrition

A varied diet is important to support good physical wellbeing. Enjoyable experiences of eating and having a range of foods in childhood and adolescence builds the foundations for eating well, and a positive relationship with food.

[The Eatwell Guide](#) indicates the proportions of different foods that make up a balanced diet. Some simple changes you could make include:

1. **Eating a balanced, varied, enjoyable and nourishing diet** throughout the day, making sure your main meals have a good mix of:
 - Carbohydrates (bread, pasta, grains)
 - Fats (oils, spreads, nuts, avocados, oily fish)
 - Proteins (pulses and legumes, tofu, chicken, beef, fish etc.)

2. **Aiming to eat five fruits and vegetables per day** (fresh, boiled, grilled, tinned, frozen or dried).
3. **Staying hydrated** by drinking mainly water, as well as milk and occasionally juice.
4. **Eating is an important social activity** so we should make time to prepare and enjoy meals with family and friends.
5. **All foods fit!** We eat foods for lots of different reasons: To fuel our bodies, to make us strong and keep our brains happy. We should create a healthy relationship with food and not associate foods with shame, guilt, indulgence or restriction.

Being active

Young people should aim for at least 60 minutes of physical activity per day. This can be:

Moderate (for example walking, cycling, dancing, skating, and PE lessons), or **Vigorous** (for example running, swimming, sports, skipping, and martial arts)

This should be spread throughout the day to break up long periods of sitting or lying down. Exercise doesn't have to mean taking part in team sports or spending lots of money on clubs or expensive equipment. Help young people to find activities they enjoy and incorporate them into their daily routine, such as walking or cycling to school. It can help with motivation to be active with friends or family.

The [NHS advice](#) that adolescent children should aim for two different types of physical activity:

1. Exercises that encourage them to move their whole body, breathe faster and feel warmer – known as aerobic exercise.
2. Exercises that strengthen muscles and bones, such as lifting weights or bodyweight exercises (like squats, lunges or push-ups).

Oral health

Taking care of our teeth and gums helps to avoid pain, feel confident and eat a varied diet. Tooth decay can lead to time off school, college, or work, and even hospital admission.

Here are our top tips for good oral health:

1. **Stick to milk and water and limit sugary drinks** (such as fizzy drinks, squash, smoothies, juice, sweetened tea or coffee). If you are having juice or squash, have it alongside a meal.
2. **Reduce sugary snacks.** If you do have a sugary snack, rinse with water afterwards.

3. **Brush every surface of every tooth twice a day** (last thing at night and on at least one other occasion) for two minutes with fluoride toothpaste. Don't rinse with water afterwards to help the fluoride stay on the teeth.

For more oral health advice, go to the [NHS website](#).

Tips to support young people to stay healthy

- **Provide structure and routine:** Daily and weekly habits, such as regular movement, bedtime routines, and consistent mealtimes, can help adolescents feel secure and develop resilience.
- **Support your adolescent children to do things that make them feel good:** This might be spending time with friends or family, taking part in a hobby or developing a skill, like cooking.
- **Take time to communicate with your adolescent child:** Try to create a calm, safe space where your child can talk to you without feeling judged. Ask questions and listen to what they say. Spend quality time together, for example over a meal or a walk.
- **If you notice a change or are concerned about your adolescent's physical wellbeing, for example their eating or weight:** Try to understand the problem and provide reassurance that you hear them and are there to help. Ask how they are feeling rather than commenting on their physical appearance.
- **As a parent or carer make sure to look after your own mental and physical health too:** This will help you to support yourself and those you care about.

Where can I get local advice and support?

The [NHS Healthier Together](#) website provides lots of information relating to adolescent children's health.

[ChatHealth](#) is a way to text a school nurse to find out about local services and get confidential help and support. Text 07507 332160. The service is available Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm (excluding bank holidays). If you live on the Isle of Wight, or would rather speak to someone face-to-face, you can ask your school or college about their nursing service.

Also see our resources on [Sleep Hygiene](#) and [Eating Disorders](#).

Where can I get more advice from national resources?

<i>Link and/or QR code</i>	<i>Description</i>
Health For Teens Everything you wanted to know about health	Health for Teens introduces a new and different way for young people aged 11-19 to learn about their health.

Talking to your child about feelings – NHS	NHS advice for parents and carers on talking to your child about feelings.
Advice for parents – Keeping your children healthy	NHS advice for parents on keeping your child a healthy weight.
Staying healthy Childline	Advice from Childline for teens on staying healthy.
Free Body Image Resources for Parents and Teachers — The Body Happy Org	Resources on promoting positive body image.
Five ways to Wellbeing Health and social care Hampshire County Council (hants.gov.uk)	Evidence suggests there are 5 steps you can take to improve your health and wellbeing. Trying these things could help you feel more positive and to get the most out of life.