

Teens and Physical Activity
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The holiday season is over. School has resumed and most people have returned to work. While the family members and decorations have been removed, the excess weight gain from holiday treats and forgotten exercise routines has managed to stick around. Those extra pounds after the holidays is one of the most difficult things to get rid of and helps explain why the number one New Year's resolution is to lose weight. This could also explain why January 17-23, 2010 has been labeled as "Healthy Weight Week."

Modifying your diet is a great way to drop pounds but it is equally important for the entire family to work physical activity into your weight loss plans.

Physical activity is good for the body and mind. Regular exercise helps maintain weight, builds muscle, and strengthens bones. While exercise is important for everyone, it is even more so for children and teens. In addition to the health benefits, youth who are physically active have higher self-esteem and experience less anxiety and depression than inactive youth. Furthermore, the fitness routines established early on will continue into adulthood.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 16% of children and teens ages 6-19 are overweight which is nearly triple the proportion reported in 1980. One of the reasons that the number of overweight youth is increasing is because they do not get enough exercise. The following are tips to help get your teen up and moving.

The United States Department of Agriculture states that, for optimum health, this age group should be active at least 60 minutes on most days. If there is not a place near your home to be active, look into youth organizations or recreation leagues that offer activities your child would enjoy, such as tennis or basketball. Getting involved in something they perceive as fun will increase the chances they will continue that activity throughout their lifetime.

Create active family time. Turn off the television and make physical activity a family affair. Ride bikes, go on walks, or do yard work together as a family. It is important that you show your commitment to better health by being active and exercising regularly.

A great program that can involve the whole family is "Walk Georgia." This 8-week program sponsored by the University of Georgia Cooperative Extension is designed to increase physical activity in a fun way. As participants log their physical activity on-line, they will take a virtual tour throughout Georgia. Registration will begin on February 14th and the program will officially begin on March 1st. Participate as an individual or as a team of four. Regardless, the goal is to get up and get active. For more information on this unique exercise opportunity, log onto to www.walkgeorgia.org.

For more information about the 4-H program or other youth development issues, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.