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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

Know! encourages you to share this Parent Tip with friends and family.

Learn more at:
PreventionActionAlliance.org

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Start Talking!

Building a Drug-Free Future



Know! Every Bite Counts

May is Mental Health Month, an annual campaign to educate people on how a healthy lifestyle can help to prevent the onset or worsening of mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, as well as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and other chronic health problems.

Diet and nutrition is not just about our waistlines, it also has a huge impact on our mental wellness. The same holds true for your students. What goes into their growing and developing bodies affects both their physical and mental health.

According to Mental Health America, studies show young people with the healthiest diets are about **half as likely** to have depression compared to those with diets highest in junk and processed foods.

So what can we as teachers do to improve the diets and fitness of our teens? Mental Health America recommends the following:

Food Can Change Your Brain

- Diet is linked to the hippocampus, a key area of the brain involved in learning, memory, and mental health. People with healthy diets have more hippocampal volume than those with unhealthy diets.
- Eating more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, fish, olive oil, and other healthy foods while eating less unhealthy junk and processed foods can be an effective treatment strategy for depression.
- One study found that a third of participants with depression experienced full relief of their symptoms after improving their diet. The more people improved their diets, the more their depression improved.

Contrary to Popular Belief - A Healthy Diet Doesn't Have to be Expensive

- A healthy diet can actually be cheaper than junk and processed food.
- Save money by choosing canned or frozen vegetables and fish, and dried fruits and beans. These are nutritionally similar to fresh foods, stay good longer, and are usually less expensive!

Nutrients to Keep in Mind

OMEGA 3 FATTY ACIDS

- Essential to brain health; reduces inflammation and risk of heart disease.
- Found in oily fish like salmon, trout, mackerel, anchovies and sardines, as well as albacore tuna, walnuts, flax seeds, chia seeds, and dark green leafy vegetables like brussels sprouts, kale and spinach.
- Fish oil supplements that are high in the EPA type of Omega 3 fatty acids can help mental health. Studies show they can benefit some people with depression as much as anti-depressants.

B GROUP VITAMINS

- Help to regulate neurotransmitters, immune function, and amino



Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.

Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free



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acids – the building blocks of proteins in the body.

- Found in green leafy vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, as well as fish (salmon, trout, tuna), beef, lamb, clams, poultry (chicken and turkey), eggs, and milk. Breakfast cereals with added vitamin B12 are a good option for vegetarians.
- People with a lack of vitamin B12 may be at increased risk for depression, especially if they are older.

VITAMIN D

- Important for optimal brain functioning, including mood and critical thinking.
- Fatty fish like salmon and tuna have the most naturally occurring vitamin D. Some vitamin D can also be found in eggs, other dairy foods, and fortified beverages and breakfast cereals. Cod liver oil supplements are high in vitamins A and D and have some omega 3 fatty acids as well.
- Sunlight is a major source of vitamin D. Between 5 and 30 minutes of sun exposure twice a week generally produces enough vitamin D in the body. Lighter-skinned people require less time in the sun than those with darker skin.
- Low levels of vitamin D are linked to depression, particularly seasonal depression, which happens with reduced sunlight during winter.

The quality of the food you and your students' consume can and does impact your overall physical and mental health. Eating nutritious foods can go a long way toward achieving a healthy lifestyle, so it is vital to make every bite count.

Mental Health America is the May is Mental Health campaign sponsor. You are encouraged to lead the challenge with your students to make small changes – both physically and mentally – to create huge gains for everyone's overall health and wellbeing.

Source: [Mental Health America: Fitness 4Mind4Body - Diet and Nutrition, May 2018.](#)

* Statistics and information taken, with permission, directly from Mental Health America.

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