

## *How Can I Help My Overweight Teenager?*

**Accept, support and encourage your teen.** Many of your teen's feelings and thoughts about themselves come from how they perceive their parents and friend see them. The more you accept your teen for who he/she is, the more he/she will be able to accept him/her self. Be there to **listen** when he/she needs to talk without lecturing or trying to fix the problem. Learn about **body image** and help your teen understand what body image is and how it affects his/her self-esteem. Teach him/her to be **media literate**.

**When starting a healthier diet for your teen, include the whole family.** According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), 'Parents should try not to set their teen apart because of their weight, but focus on gradually changing their family's physical activity and eating habits. Family involvement helps to teach everyone **healthful habits** and does not single out the overweight teen.'

**Get your family active - out and about.** Increasing physical activity while maintaining a healthy diet; is the way to a healthy lifestyle for everyone in the family along with your teen. A healthy lifestyle is a teen's best defense against being overweight. So plan fun and active activities for the whole family to enjoy. Make them a part of your daily/weekly routine, a fun **habit** and try not to turn them into a chore. Be a role model and enjoy the activities with your kids.

**Encourage your teen to develop a good attitude about healthy eating.** The NIMH says: 'Don't place your teen on a restrictive diet. Teenagers should never be placed on a restrictive diet to lose weight, unless a doctor supervises one for medical reasons. Limiting what teens eat may be harmful to their health and interfere with their growth and development. To promote proper growth and development and prevent overweight, parents should offer the whole family a wide variety of foods from each of the food groups Most of the foods in your diet should come from the grain products group (6-11 servings), the vegetable group (3-5 servings), and the fruit group (2-4 servings). (See chart for suggested serving sizes.) Your diet should include moderate amounts of foods from the milk group (2-3 servings) and beans group (2-3 servings). Foods that provide few nutrients and are high in fat and sugars should be used sparingly.'

All of these tips can help you help your overweight teen not only get him/her to a healthy weight, but also help his/her **self-esteem** and **confidence**. Plus, the whole family will be working towards a healthy lifestyle.