

Unplug and Get Fit

The time that your tween or teen spends using cell phones, playing video games, and watching TV is time he could spend being active. Motivate your child to power down electronic devices, get off the couch, and stay healthier with these ideas.



Reduce screen time

Experts recommend that parents put consistent limits on screen time. Here are ways you can help tame the habit in your house.

Establish ground rules

Consider keeping devices put away and the TV off until homework and chores are finished. Or cut off electronics after a certain time at night. Also, you might ban cell phones from the dinner table and during family outings.

Plan ahead for TV viewing

On Sunday evenings, have your tween choose one show to watch each day that week. She could post the schedule by the TV as a reminder. *Tip:* If she has a hard time picking just one show per day, suggest that she “bank” extras to watch later. Maybe she’ll skip a night of TV if she has a lot of homework and watch two shows Friday night or Saturday morning.

Make simple adjustments

A few easy changes can lessen screen time for everyone. For example, avoid using the TV as background noise—turn it off when no one is watching.

Have your child shut down the computer when he’s finished so it’s less tempting to start mindlessly browsing the internet. You might even give away an extra TV or video game system—fewer devices mean fewer opportunities for screen time.



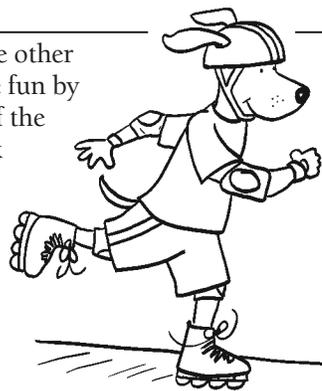
Keep it public

You’ll have a better chance of monitoring screen time if your teen doesn’t have a TV or computer in her room. In fact, teenagers with TVs in their rooms tend to watch more, see shows they otherwise wouldn’t be allowed to view, and get less sleep. They also run a greater risk of being overweight, because kids often snack while watching.

Go screen-free!

Encourage your tween to explore other interests and find new ways to have fun by designating certain days or hours of the week as screen-free. Together, think about the best times for this, then brainstorm things to do instead, such as:

- Hold regular neighborhood basketball or kickball games.
- Play a few sets of tennis at a community court.



- Take a family hike through the woods, up a mountain, or around a lake.
- Work out along with exercise videos from the library, or find some online to stream for free.
- Jog around the school track.
- Sign up for sports or fitness classes through your local parks and recreation department. Attend open gym at the community center.
- Go roller skating or inline skating.
- Head to the park and play Frisbee.



Increase active time

At least 60 minutes of physical activity a day will help your tween be healthy, strong, alert, and energetic. Inspire her to get moving with tips like these.

Set goals

Forget the word “exercise”—encourage your teen to be active just because it’s fun! She might start by writing down how many minutes a day she’s physically active. Have her note organized activities (PE, team practices) as well as time spent walking to a friend’s house or playing outside when she

Activity around the house

Your teen will get a good workout and burn calories with these suggestions he can use at home:

- Pace or walk briskly around the house while talking on the phone.
- Run up and down the stairs five times.
- Do 20 jumping jacks during TV commercials.
- Pull weeds.
- Wash the windows.
- Invite friends over for a group car wash.
- Clean out the garage, and then have a yard sale. *Idea:* Use the proceeds to buy active equipment like a basketball, skates, or a jump rope.



babysits. She could gradually increase her active time, perhaps by adding 10 minutes a day for two weeks, another 10 minutes a day the following two weeks, and so on.

Work out together

Your good habits will rub off on your child. When you exercise, invite him along. Or maybe you have an active hobby like gardening or dancing. Share your interest, and your teen will stay active and learn a new skill in the process. As a bonus, you’ll spend more time with him. *Note:* If you don’t get much physical activity, consider starting alongside your tween. He’ll see that you’re trying, too.

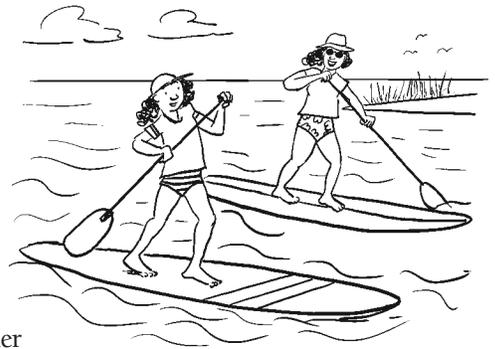
Try something new

A soccer player might like rock climbing—a great all-around workout that strengthens hands, shoulders, back, stomach, legs, and feet. Or your cheerleader may enjoy biking on weekends.

If your teen likes to swim, suggest

other water sports, such as rowing, canoeing, kayaking, waterskiing, or paddleboarding. A child who prefers quiet activities might take to yoga,

Pilates, or tai chi. Her school may offer some of these as PE options, or she can look for free or low-cost classes at your community center. *Tip:* Your tween could ask a friend to discover a new sport with her.



Track your steps

Fitness trackers or pedometers can motivate your family to walk more by counting the steps you take—and making you want to take more! Look for reasonably priced ones at a discount retailer or online. Then, challenge each person to walk at least 10,000 steps a day. *Idea:* Hold a friendly family competition. Every night, check your devices together. Who will win each day’s walking challenge?

Be a volunteer

Support your favorite charity and get fit at the same time. Many towns and cities organize walks, runs, or bike rides to raise money for causes like health or the environment. To learn about local events, read the newspaper or go online. Encourage your teenager to participate in other types of active community service, too, such as walking dogs for an animal shelter or cleaning up neighborhoods and parks. Websites like volunteermatch.org can help him find opportunities in your community.

Editor’s Note: Teen Food & Fitness™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.

