

# Lean, **mean** teens

» Teen fitness |  
By Mish McCormack



# Overweight teens tend to grow into overweight adults. Mish McCormack has some ideas for breaking the cycle

{ The human body is designed to sustain long periods of physical exertion punctuated with short bursts of intense activity. Our current lifestyles, however, generally involve not much more than driving to work, taking the lift to our desks, sitting for hours and then heading home for more sitting while watching TV. Given this scenario, it should not come as any great surprise to learn that New Zealanders are in the grip of what is commonly now known as an obesity epidemic.

Of particular concern is that we are now seeing more overweight teenagers than ever before. Unfortunately, these young people often grow into overweight adults who are susceptible to serious health problems such as Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and arthritis, among other ailments.

Every time our teens sit with the video game console held firmly in their hands or sprawl out on the couch in front of the TV, their rate of calorie-burning diminishes significantly. It's clearly our responsibility as parents to help them find ways to live a healthy lifestyle, but having said that, we all know that motivating a teenager be somewhat challenging. Nevertheless, research shows that if a proposed activity is fun and makes them feel good, they will more than likely want to give it a try.

As a rule, teens should be encouraged to get vigorous exercise for about an hour a day on at least three days of the week, along with regular, more moderate activity for an hour every day. If they are into sports, they will have

practice, games and other associated opportunities to get out and about. If not, they might have to be creative about finding the activities that best suit them. Some suggestions include:

- Walking, cycling, or skating to school.
- Creating a routine involving walking, skating, cycling, swimming, dancing, throwing a frisbee, running, or skipping rope every day after school – ideally with a friend or friends.
- Joining a gym or attending a community exercise class.
- Taking part in fun runs and other organised community sporting events.
- Doing some work around the property. Mowing the lawns, washing the car, cleaning the windows, gardening, or sweeping the driveway all burn calories.
- Taking the dog for a long walk.

Strength training can also sometimes be included as part of an exercise routine for teens. This helps build muscular strength and endurance, and boosts their metabolism. It can involve exercises such as squats, push-ups, or crunches, using weights, machines, or their own bodyweight. It is strongly recommended, however, that they seek advice from a sports coach, certified personal trainer, or other expert before beginning to lift weights. This is to ensure that they know which exercises are most appropriate for their particular requirements, and are taught safe technique and form to prevent injuries.

There is absolutely no doubt that many teens need a lot more exercise than they are currently getting, so take an honest look at the lifestyle of the young people in your life. Exercise is fun, and it will keep them healthier, less stressed, more relaxed and full of energy as they prepare themselves for a fulfilling and productive future! ◀

**Mishfitness** conducts workplace-based health promotion programmes for a number of New Zealand's major organisations. To find out more, visit: [www.mishfitness.com](http://www.mishfitness.com).

