



The Ticking Time Bomb in Teens

*That is setting daughters up
for early illness and diseases*

By Jason Cheng, DO

Osteoporosis, Obesity, Arthritis, Diabetes, Mellitus, Hypertension and Menopause, these are problems only women over 35 have to worry about. Your teen daughters is a young, vibrant, enthusiastic individuals who doesn't need to concern herself with these for at least twenty years, right?



Unfortunately, disturbing studies regarding the health habits of today's adolescent youth reveal that teens are ticking time bombs.

We all know that smoking, eating junk food and lying in the sun contribute to cancer, diabetes and heart disease. Recent studies show that the incidence of these diseases are creeping up in younger populations of females, especially in countries that have adopted a western lifestyle of a high fat diet and munching in front of the computer.

Diseases such as smallpox, the bubonic plague, and malaria have been an issue of public health more than pharmaceutical medicine and hi-powered drugs. Obesity with its related health consequences is our modern day plague. Without a magic pill, we must rely on a timeless classic solution—education.

Obesity is one of the primary causes in most modern day chronic illnesses. It leads to diabetes, heart disease, respiratory problems, sleep disorders (Obstructive sleep apnea), as well as premature wear and tear on the back and joints. Diabetes is the number one cause of blindness, kidney failure, "silent" heart attacks and limb amputations.

These may seem like trivial concerns relevant to those over 45. In actuality the habits learned as children and teens from their parents can predetermine your child's later health and quality of life.

Thirty is the Magic Number

One disturbing indication of this learned poor diet behavior is the factors leading to osteoporosis. Known widely as a bone-loss disorder, medical studies are showing that calcium deposition into bones ENDS after a woman turns 30. Prior to age thirty is the only time a woman can invest calcium into her bone bank. After this age, she cannot add more calcium; her body will only withdraw it. She must live the rest of her life with what she put in prior to thirty. The period in which bone formation is highest is during

adolescence. It is during this period when bone growth is at its highest and when her diet is most critical to her long-term health.

For girls who don't get adequate sources of calcium, (via a healthy diet, not only through cow milk), the chances of calcium depletion leading to premature osteoporosis is elevated. Educating yourself and your tween and teen child about appropriate sources of calcium, including supplementation is critical for your daughter's lifetime bone health.

Exercise and Bones

Increasing studies are confirming the crucial link between bone strength and physical activity. If you or any of your female relatives have been diagnosed with osteoporosis, chances are your doctor will prescribe weight-bearing exercise before he even speaks about medication. Weight-bearing exercises strengthens the bone matrix and reduce re-absorption. This is particularly crucial during adolescent years, the period in when calcium is rapidly absorbed and forms the girls basic bone matrix. This building slows considerable during her twenties.

The message is clear: **If your daughter is not getting regular physical activity, including weight bearing as well as aerobic, she is at elevated risk for premature osteoporosis.** With children growing up in front of cable TV and video games, the opportunity for physical activity has been drastically reduced, increasing the likelihood of both female and male osteoporosis.

Looking Healthy and Being Healthy Are Two Different Things.

As a physician who has worked with professional dancers across the US, I've had the opportunity to see the strongest, and most flexible athletes ever. From the outside, these svelte performers are the epitome of physical fitness. Yet, though they were slim and toned, their diets were horrid. Female ballerinas share a similar diet to many "slim" teenage girls: cottage cheese, chocolate cake, coffee, and cigarettes. Their diet lacks the necessary calcium, vitamins, minerals, and protein essential to building a reproductively healthy young woman. Many of these elite individuals are now suffering from a range of premature related illnesses including spine, joint problems and depression. Many can trace the cause to poor diet. A girl or young woman may appear healthy, disguising the true reality. Without a nutritious diet including the required calcium, vitamins, and minerals during her crucial adolescent years, she (or he) is priming herself/himself for problems in the near future.

The best way to deal with this is to teach by example. Teenagers are rebellious by nature; they are also extremely impressionable. We are in an era where our unhealthy habits are literally killing us. Blaming public education, corporate greed, fast food or the government will not improve the lives of anyone. Taking the initiative to promote a healthy way of living is the one gift you can give your children this year for which they will thank you forever.



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