

Part 2: To Diet or Not to Diet, That is the DIETING—OUR NATIONAL PASTIME

Studies show that increasing numbers of younger children are going on diets in order to be thin. According to the U.S. Public Health Service, children ages seven to seventeen years old are the heaviest users of diet pills. It is estimated that as many as 5% of high school girls have anorexia nervosa and 20% are estimated to engage in bulimic behavior. Body image too has become of great importance among teenage boys, who may take on a host of unhealthy practices in hopes of building a more muscular body. At a time when children are

WHAT'S WRONG WITH DIETING ANYWAY?

Girls may mistakenly think that they are “getting fat” as their bodies develop during puberty. Girls need to understand that the development of breasts and hips, which does involve increased fat stores, is part of normal growth and essential for reproductive health. Helping girls become more comfortable with—even celebrating—their changing bodies is an important step in building positive

To Diet or Not To Diet:

1. When you don't give your body the fuel it requires, it will start craving high fat, high calorie foods. This is not an eating disorder! It's your body's natural response to starvation. So, going on very low calorie diets or skipping meals just put your system into deprivation state. Binge eating food when your “willpower” wanes is your body's natural response.
2. When your body doesn't get the calories it needs, it will slow down its metabolic rate in order to expend fewer calories. This in turn, slows down your body's rate of burning calories, so rather than losing weight, your body is actually making it easier to gain weight.
3. If you don't give your body adequate fuel, it will eventually resort to using its own supplies. However, instead of burning fat, it will burn muscle tissue, which is the very thing you want to keep! Burning muscle tissue will make you tired, depressed, lethargic, and without energy. In this state, you are certainly not interested in exercising, which is one of the best ways to keep your body in shape, strong, and healthy.
4. The more you diet; the harder it is to lose weight. Your body becomes accustomed to lower intakes of food and slows down its metabolism to accommodate the reduced fuel input.

From “Hands-on-Health: The Activity Guidebook for Working with Teens” by Barbara Storper, MS, RD