

How Healthy Are You...Really?

SEPTEMBER 2016



You already know the basics—apples are better for you than doughnuts, and exercise is something you should do. But sometimes the right health choices aren't as obvious. That's why we've hidden eight sneaky habits that can mess up your health in this illustration. Try your best to spot them. Don't be bummed if you missed a few—this article is packed with tips to help you feel unstoppable all year long!

Health Mistake No. 1: Distracted Eating

You may think watching Netflix is an efficient way to unwind while you have a post-school snack; after all, once you refuel, you've got #stufftodo! The problem is, your hand hits the bottom of the chip bag faster when you're multitasking, which can leave you feeling overstuffed and blah. (One study found that people ate 71 percent more mac and cheese when watching TV!) Why? Instead of stopping when they're full, distracted eaters rely on external cues—like the end of an episode of Friends—to stop a snack session, says eating behavior expert Brian Wansink, author of *Mindless Eating*.

THE FIX: Measure out a single serving of a snack before you sit down. And prior to getting seconds, pause for a quick timeout. It can take your stomach up to 20 minutes to let your brain know it's full!

Health Mistake No. 2: The Sneeze and Run

What's to blame for that annoying, won't-quit sickness that spreads around school every year? You! Get this: One sneeze can send 100,000 germs into the air that travel at up to 100 miles per hour. Covering your mouth is important, yes, but how you block the spray is key. Sneezing into your palm leaves you spritzed with icky droplets that carry the cold virus. Touch yourself or someone else, and you're putting those germs right back into rotation.

THE FIX: Sneeze into your bent elbow or a tissue instead. And if you do forget and use your hand, follow the advice of microbiologist Philip M. Tierno Jr., author of *The Secret Life of Germs*, and wash your hands with soap and water as soon as possible. (A quick rinse doesn't count; you need to scrub hard for 20 seconds to really knock those germs off!)

Health Mistake No. 3: "Healthy" Foods That Aren't

When dinner feels like, oh, another 1,200 hours away, you may pick up a granola bar or a fruit smoothie to stop a growling stomach. But soon after, you're hungry again. What gives? Many of those "healthy" choices are actually loaded with sugar. (Some granola bars pack as much of it as chocolate bars!) Sweet treats trigger your body to release a flood of insulin, a hormone that causes your blood sugar to plummet, says Jo Bartell, a registered dietitian. When that happens, the hunger returns, your energy nose-dives—and focusing on homework seems impossible.

THE FIX: Reading labels is your best weapon against stealth sugar sources that can cause a system crash. (Your intake should max out at 20 to 32 grams a day, says the American Heart Association, so budget accordingly!)

Health Mistake No. 4: The Perma-Slouch

When you're deep in thought in class, you probably don't even realize you're scrunching up your shoulders or contorting your body. But according to Dr. Juliana VanderPluym, a headache specialist at the Mayo Clinic, messed-up posture can contribute to throbbing between your ears. Not to mention that slouch may be linked to your soaring stress levels. A study from Harvard University found that those who adopt a more powerful posture—relaxed shoulders and straight spines—have lower levels of cortisol, the stress hormone.

THE FIX: Periodically check your posture by imagining there's a cord attached to the top of your head, pulling up! Or hold this stretch for a few seconds: Place both feet flat on the floor, clasp your hands behind your back, and extend your arms as you push your chest out.

Health Mistake No. 5: The Cellphone Snuggle

It may seem fine to relax with a few games of Candy Crush before bed, but research has found that snuggling with a cell phone is the No. 1 sleep-sucker for teens. And it's not just the middle-of-the-night beeps that are making you yawn through first period! Your phone emits something called blue light, which triggers your brain's "on" switch, setting off a ripple effect. Not only will you be more alert before bed, but you'll be sleepier when your alarm goes off and you'll take longer to wake up too.

THE FIX: The best way to wake up feeling like you can conquer the world is to put your phone in another room at bedtime, says Dr. Craig Canapari, director of the Yale Pediatric Sleep Center. Not going to happen? At least set your phone to its "night mode," which dims the screen, or click "Do Not Disturb" to silence alerts.

Health Mistake No. 6: A Lunchtime Carb Fest

We get it: Sometimes the cafeteria's meals don't call your name quite like the pretzels and fries. But when you eat a lunch that's practically 100 percent simple carbohydrates, you're missing out on the nutrients that keep your pep up and your concentration solid all the way through the day: fiber (found in fruits and veggies), protein (you get it from lean meat, like turkey or chicken, and from fish and beans), and healthy fats (think: avocado, peanut butter).

THE FIX: To stay full and energized, practice the three-for-three rule: Eat three meals a day that each have a mix of all three nutrients. A sandwich made with turkey (protein—check!) on whole-wheat bread (to get those high-fiber carbs) with avocado (hooray healthy fat!) is definitely a winning lunch. Or instead of having two slices of pizza, grab one—then pair it with sliced veggies and fruit to balance things out.

Health Mistake No. 7: A Staring Contest With Your Computer

One of the top reasons you may feel like there's a marching band in your head when you've been scrolling online for hours? The muscles in your eyes (they're called ciliary muscles) could get stuck constantly firing when you perform up-close tasks, explains Dr. Douglas Lazzaro, an ophthalmologist at SUNY Downstate Medical Center in New York City. And like

any muscles, these guys get tired and sore. That's when you may experience the symptoms of digital eye strain—dry, irritated eyes; blurred vision; and head, neck, and back pain.

THE FIX: First, if you can't see a website without putting your face against it, visit the eye doc to get your vision checked. (You may just need cool new glasses!) But if getting too close is simply a bad habit, start positioning your screen an arm's length away from your face and practice the 20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break to look away from your screen and blink. This prevents your eyes from drying out, which makes the eye strain/headache effect less likely to happen.

Health Mistake No. 8: Your Nonstop Soundtrack

Want to keep enjoying your favorite tunes? Turn your music down to avoid becoming one of the billion-plus teens and young adults who are at risk for noise-induced hearing loss, according to the World Health Organization. "You have 15,000 tiny hair cells in each ear that help your brain process sounds," says Dr. Michael S. Cohen, director of the Pediatric Hearing Loss Clinic at Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. "Once they're gone, they're gone." What's the cost? Music or speech may sound muffled, or you might get a ringing sensation in your ears. Eventually, you could lose your hearing completely.

THE FIX: Doctors suggest headphones that sit on your head like earmuffs rather than earbuds, which pipe music directly into your ear canal. You can set your phone to limit its max volume to a safe level too—no higher than 70 percent, says Cohen. (On an iPhone, go to Settings > Music > Volume Level.)

So You Want to be Healthier?

We helped three teens turn health hopes into power goals—and challenge you to do the same!

GET MORE SLEEP

"I need eight hours instead of six."

Ebun Kalejaiye, a 10th grader in California

WHY IT'S WEAK

Eight hours is a specific goal, which is good! But "two more hours might be too much to accomplish at first," says clinical psychologist Janet K. Kennedy, founder of NYC Sleep Doctor. "Shoot for an extra half hour to start—and go from there."

DO THE WORK

Keep a diary of all afterschool activities for a week to see where your time is going.

"Technology is one of the biggest culprits," says Kennedy. "Study breaks are important, but you might need to set a time limit—maybe even an alarm—to get back on task."

POWER GOAL

"This week, I'll limit myself to one 15-minute tech break a day while studying so I can get to bed 30 minutes earlier."

EAT HEALTHIER

"I make bad choices on the go."

Matt Ricker, a 9th-grader in New Jersey

WHY IT'S WEAK

Matt knows where he needs help; now he just needs a more specific goal to act on. “When you have a plan, you’re more likely to stick to it even when you’re tired or hungry,” says Amy Gorin, a registered dietitian in Jersey City, New Jersey.

DO THE WORK

Investigate why you’re slipping up on the go, says Gorin. “Are there no healthy snacks available at school? Do you forget to eat until your stomach’s growling? Then identify healthy snacks you can pack so you never get to that point of desperation.”

POWER GOAL

“Each day, I will pack my bag with nuts, an apple, and carrot sticks and make sure I eat every 3-5 hours to ward off hunger.”

EXERCISE MORE

“I’d like to jog instead of sleeping in.”

Kelly Jin, a 10th-grader in New York

WHY IT’S WEAK

With no time frame, there’s no urgency. Plus, you want to say how often you’d like to exercise. “Working toward a measurable goal will keep you motivated when the urge to sleep in is strong,” says exercise physiologist Angela Salveo.

DO THE WORK

“Print out a calendar and post it where you can see it,” says Salveo. Then mark up some achievable short-term goals (the 10 days you want to wake up to jog this month) and a bigger long-term goal to keep you inspired (like signing up for a 5K race in the spring!).

POWER GOAL

“I will complete the 5K race in my town next spring by sticking to my 10-runs-a-month training calendar.”

Just the Basics!

Experts say these health habits make the biggest difference.

1. EAT BREAKFAST.

People who skip it have a tougher time remembering things and feel fatigued in the afternoon. Protein gives a morning meal staying power, so pair toast with peanut butter or an egg.

2. YOU SNOOZE, YOU WIN.

Sleeping 8 to 9 hours a night can help you make healthier choices all day and feel less anxious, according to research.

3. MOVE MORE.

Studies show that exercise is the best medicine—a headache-reliever, stress reducer, and energizer all in one! Try breaking your daily 30-minute goal into 10-minute bursts.

4. SIP SMART: H₂O x 8!

Staying hydrated with eight glasses of water a day can help you stay focused and prevent migraines. (Hate it? Add flavor with orange slices.)

5. JUST BREATHE.

Wouldn't it be cool if your body had a built-in stress reliever? It does! Once a day, take two minutes to breathe deeply: in for five seconds, out for five more. Every breath feeds your muscles and brain fresh oxygen.