

research in brief

Teens Think About Their Health

A major section of *The General Mills American Family Report 1978-1979: Family Health in an Era of Stress* deals with the attitudes of teens and their parents toward health and health care. Data were collected via 1,254 interviews with adult family members and 263 questionnaires completed by teens. The total sample consisted of 1,254 families from across the country.

The following trends are reported:

1. Teens take a positive and active view of health behavior. They realize the necessity of working at being healthy. Furthermore, parents are influential in teens' personal commitment to good health.
2. Teenagers don't see themselves as being a "sedentary group." As a matter of fact, two out of three reported they exercised daily.
3. It's more difficult for teens than for their parents to discuss most health-related issues in the family setting, with the exception of sex.
4. Regardless of their reluctance to discuss certain topics, *teens do want to know more about the family's health situation, including medical costs and marital problems.*
5. Teens place the responsibility for family health care on both parents.
6. With respect to unwanted pregnancies, teenagers and parents agree that "the main influences are not from the home environment but from outside and include peer pressure, movies, and television." Most felt their parents should be the major source of birth control information.
7. Most importantly, "lack of information is standing in the way of any real commitment to health or

health practices among teenagers." Most admitted that they weren't well-informed about diet and nutrition, preventive medicine, how to handle emotional problems, and health care.

The implications for Extension programming based on this study using a national probability sample are astounding. First or foremost, teens need health information. 4-H can certainly provide programs to meet this important challenge. Secondly, the family unit appears to be the best avenue for health education, especially sex education. Extension must develop family-centered health education programs.

The General Mills American Family Report 1978-1979: Family Health in an Era of Stress. Yankelovich, Skelly, and White, Inc. Minneapolis, Minnesota: General Mills, 1979.

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