

## **GENERATION OF 'WORRIED TEENS' EMERGES FROM NEW STUDY**

Teens worry about their appearance and fitness but they ignore key health education messages.

A new study shows that:

- 30% girls (compared with 19% boys) weigh themselves at least weekly, and 7% girls weigh themselves daily
- 38% worry about their health at least once a week, and 16% every day
- 3 in 10 (31%) has visited a doctor inside the past month

The worriers are noticeably more likely to be girls, and more likely to be under 16.

The 'worried-teens' are identified in a new study called 'My Body, My Self', published by the Nestlé Social Research Programme, which looks at young people's values and motives about healthy living. Fieldwork was carried out by MORI in April and May 2004 amongst a representative sample of 11 to 21 year olds in Britain.

Both sexes want to be fitter – more than 7 out of 10 - but girls in particular are concerned about their appearance. Nearly 6 in 10 girls want to weigh less. But exercise and eating habits don't match this. Only around a half (53% girls, 55% boys) exercise once a week (with the exception of walking). Less than half (45%) eat fresh fruit daily and only just over half (56%) check out sugar and fat in the food they eat.

### **The younger worriers**

Age appears to make a difference to the concerns of young people, with younger teens appearing to worry more frequently about their health than those over the age of sixteen.

Under 16's are more likely to exercise to maintain or lose weight, to avoid fat and sugar, red meat and food that will give them spots. The findings suggest that teens in this group are the most concerned about their appearance and the most sensitive to health messages.

### **Londoners worry most, yet are fittest**

Striking regional differences emerge in attitudes to fitness and health, particularly when comparing the South with London. Surprisingly, young people living in the South, one of the six regions studied, appear to be the least fit and healthy and those in Greater London the most. Londoners are likely to worry about their health most often, compared with young people in five other regions (North, Midlands, South, Scotland and Wales).

## **“No condoms, no worry” - but drugs are dangerous**

The study also shows that messages of the health risks of drugs have got through, but less so for alcohol and sex.

- Only just over half (55%) believe binge drinking is ‘very risky’
- Only two thirds – and just 56% of boys - believe that sex without condoms is ‘very risky’

Young people see drugs as risky:

- 90% see heroin, and 86% see cocaine, as very risky
- About 7 in 10 see smoking cigarettes and a similar number cannabis as very risky

Taking risks is attractive to some young people. Around a half agree that “I like taking risks and sometimes do things that might be dangerous to my health’. Boys (53%) are more risk-taking than girls (39%), while 25% of boys are risk-averse compared with 39% of girls. Risk-takers are more likely to exercise to look good and because they like the sensation, but they are less keen on ‘healthy’ food. The risk-averse are more concerned about their health and their weight.

## **Health Information**

Parents are the most important source of health information (67%), with doctors second overall. But for girls, magazines are almost as vital a source as parents – but less than 3 in 10 boys find health information in magazines. More girls use the Internet for health information than boys – 48% compared to 36%.

Professor Helen Haste, Director of Research for the Nestlé Social Research Programme, says:

“Young people are getting a message about health but it is very tied to appearance. This could be a motivating factor in improving eating and exercise habits, but it can also just lead to anxiety. Young people are still not exercising enough and have very patchy understanding about how to monitor their eating.”

“Boys are keen on being fit, but in general they are less tuned into their health, less interested in getting information, and more sceptical about checking out what they eat. Girls are more health-aware and more likely to monitor their health. Boys’ and men’s magazines could be a major source in the future for targeting health messages to young people – as women’s magazines already do for girls.”

Ends

**Notes to editor:**

1. 'My Body, My Self' looks at young people's values and motives about healthy living and considers how young people make health decisions.
2. The research was carried out by MORI using a representative national sample of 1,058 girls and boys aged 11 – 21 years, during April and May 2004. The questionnaire was versioned and 687 young people answered questions relating to health and wellbeing. Interviews among school and college pupils were conducted in 25 establishments, on paper during self-completion sessions. Interviews with university students and others not studying were conducted via an on-line self-completion questionnaire.
3. Copies of the report are available from the Nestlé Social Research Programme secretariat, tel: 020 7388 9988.

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