The Teen Brain: 7 Things to Know

From the **NATIONAL INSTITUTE** *of* **MENTAL HEALTH**

Did you know that **big** and **important changes** happen in the brain during adolescence? Here are **seven things to know about the teen brain**:

1 Adolescence is an important time for brain development.

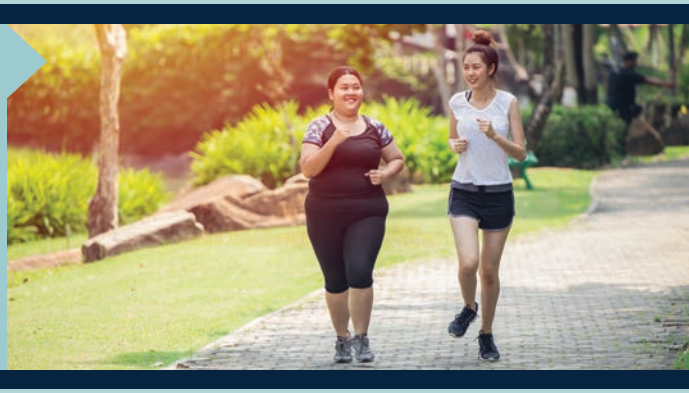
Although the brain stops growing in size by early adolescence, the teen years are all about fine-tuning how the brain works. The brain finishes developing and maturing in the mid-to-late 20s. The part of the brain behind the forehead, called the prefrontal cortex, is one of the last parts to mature. This area is responsible for skills like planning, prioritizing, and making good decisions.

2 Brain development is related to social experiences during adolescence.

Changes to the areas of the brain responsible for social processes can lead teens to focus more on peer relationships and social experiences. The emphasis on peer relationships, along with ongoing prefrontal cortex development, might lead teens to take more risks because the social benefits outweigh the possible consequences of a decision. These risks could be negative or dangerous, or they could be positive, such as talking to a new classmate or joining a new club or sport.

3 The teen brain is ready to learn and adapt.

The teen brain has an amazing ability to adapt and respond to new experiences and situations. Taking challenging classes, exercising, and engaging in creative activities like art or music can strengthen brain circuits and help the brain mature.



4 Teen brains may respond differently to stress.

Because the teen brain is still developing, teens may respond to stress differently than adults. This could increase teens' chances of developing stress-related mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression. Recognizing possible triggers and practicing effective coping techniques can help teens deal with stress. More information on managing stress is available at **www.nimh.nih.gov/stress**.

5 Most teens do not get enough sleep.

Research shows that the sleep hormone melatonin works differently in teens than in children and adults. In adolescence, melatonin levels stay high later at night and drop later in the morning, which may explain why teens may stay up late and struggle with waking up early. Many teens do not get enough sleep, making it harder to pay attention, control impulses, and do well at school. Getting good sleep at night can help support mental health.

6 Mental illnesses may begin to appear during adolescence.

Ongoing changes in the brain, along with physical, emotional, and social changes, can make teens more likely to experience mental health problems. The fact that all these changes happen at one time may explain why many mental illnesses—such as schizophrenia, anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and eating disorders—emerge during adolescence.

7 The teen brain is resilient.

Despite the stresses and challenges that come with adolescence, most teens go on to become healthy adults. Some changes in the brain during this critical phase of development actually help support resilience and mental health over the long term.

Finding help

If you or someone you know has a mental illness, is struggling emotionally, or has concerns about their mental health, there are ways to get help. Find more information at **www.nimh.nih.gov/findhelp**.

Talking openly with your doctor or other health care provider can improve your care and help you both make good choices about your health. Find tips to help prepare for and get the most out of your visit at **www.nimh.nih.gov/talkingtips**.

If you or someone you know is struggling or having thoughts of suicide, call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at **988** or chat at **988lifeline.org**. In life-threatening situations, call **911**.

National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov

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