

GENERATION STRONG

Peer-Reviewed Research for Families



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IN THIS ISSUE

0
1

YOUR CHILD'S SLEEP IS SHAPING THEIR BRAIN
SLEEP

0
2

HOW MUCH PROTEIN YOUR FAMILY NEEDS TO BUILD MUSCLE
NUTRITION

0
3

SCREEN TIME IS RESHAPING YOUR CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT
LIFESTYLE

0
4

EXERCISE FOR DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY
EXERCISE AND MENTAL HEALTH

0
5

EATING TOGETHER REDUCES DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY
NUTRITION AND MENTAL HEALTH

YOUR CHILD'S SLEEP IS SHAPING THEIR BRAIN

A comprehensive review confirms that sleep quality in childhood directly drives cognitive performance, emotional regulation, and behavior

PUBLISHED	SCOPE	STUDY TYPE	POPULATION
December 2024 – Multiple Peer-Reviewed Databases	20 Studies Reviewed	Systematic Review	Children aged 6–12 years, 2019–2024

KEY FINDINGS

Across 20 studies published between 2019 and 2024, researchers consistently found that children who sleep better perform measurably better in school, manage their emotions more effectively, and exhibit fewer behavioral problems. The studies spanned multiple countries – including the US, China, Canada, Italy, South Korea, and Australia – and all pointed to the same conclusion: sleep is not passive recovery, it is active development. Screen exposure and psychosocial stress were identified as the two primary environmental factors disrupting sleep patterns in this age group.

FOR YOUR FAMILY

The Takeaway: Most parents focus on bedtime, but the research says it's the quality of sleep – not just the hours – that matters most. A child who falls asleep with a screen in the room, or whose bedtime shifts significantly on weekends, is not getting the same developmental benefit as a child with a consistent, screen-free wind-down routine. Before spending money on tutors or behavioral interventions, look at your child's sleep. It may be the highest-leverage change you can make.

7

Studies published in 2023 ALONE confirmed the same finding – better sleep in children aged 6–12 leads directly to improved cognitive performance, emotional wellbeing, and fewer behavioral problems. The evidence has never been stronger or more consistent.

*Source: Systematic Review, Multiple Databases
December 2024, 20 studies (2019–2024)*

HOW MUCH PROTEIN YOUR FAMILY ACTUALLY NEEDS TO BUILD MUSCLE

A large meta-analysis of 74 randomized controlled trials finally settles the protein debate – and the answer is more precise than you think.

PUBLISHED	SCOPE	STUDY TYPE	POPULATION
April 2022 – Journal of Cachexia, Sarcopenia and Muscle	74 Randomized Controlled Trials	Systematic Review & Meta-Analysis	Healthy, non-obese adults

KEY FINDINGS

Researchers analyzed 74 randomized controlled trials to determine exactly how much daily protein is needed to build lean muscle mass and strength. The findings were clear: protein intake significantly improves muscle gains – but only when combined with resistance exercise. For adults under 65, the threshold was 1.6 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day. For adults over 65, meaningful gains began at 1.2 grams per kilogram per day. Critically, consuming more protein than these thresholds produced no additional muscle benefit – the body simply does not use it for further growth.

FOR YOUR FAMILY

The Takeaway: Most American adults eat far less protein than these thresholds – and most protein supplements advertise far more than necessary. For a 150-pound adult, the optimal target is roughly 109 grams of protein per day, combined with regular resistance training. For a 130-pound adult, that's about 94 grams. The source matters less than the consistency – eggs, chicken, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, and legumes all count. Start tracking for one week and you may be surprised how far off the mark your household actually is.

1.6g That's the daily protein target – per kilogram of body weight – confirmed across 74 randomized controlled trials to maximize muscle growth in adults under 65. More than that doesn't help. Less than that leaves results on the table.

Source: Journal of Cachexia, Sarcopenia and Muscle – April 2022, 74-trial meta-analysis

SCREEN TIME IS RESHAPING HOW YOUR CHILDREN DEVELOP

A decade of research reviewed – the evidence linking excessive screen use to physical, cognitive, emotional, and social harm in children is now overwhelming.

PUBLISHED	SCOPE	STUDY TYPE	POPULATION
2025 – PubMed / Scopus / Web of Science / PsycINFO	46 Studies Reviewed (2014–2024)	Narrative Review	Children & adolescents aged 0–18 years

KEY FINDINGS

After reviewing 46 peer-reviewed studies published over the last decade, researchers found consistent evidence that higher levels of screen use are associated with reduced physical activity, poorer sleep, attention difficulties, and challenges in emotional and social functioning. Screen time displaces the very behaviors – movement, unstructured play, face-to-face interaction, and sleep – that drive healthy development. One important nuance: limited or educational screen use, particularly when a parent is actively involved, showed neutral or occasionally positive effects in certain contexts. The harm comes primarily from passive, high-volume, unmonitored use.

FOR YOUR FAMILY

The Takeaway: The question is no longer whether screen time affects your child's development – it does. The question is what you're going to do about it. The research points to three practical levers: total daily limits, consistent removal of screens from bedrooms at night, and active parental involvement when screens are used. Co-viewing and discussing content with your child transforms passive consumption into an interactive experience – and that distinction matters enormously to developmental outcomes.

46 Studies reached the same conclusion: high levels of screen use in children and adolescents are linked to reduced physical activity, poorer sleep, attention problems, and social difficulties. The evidence is no longer emerging – it's settled.

Source: Narrative Review – 2025, PubMed/Scopus/Web of Science/PsycINFO, 46 studies (2014–2024)

EXERCISE IS AS EFFECTIVE AS MEDICATION FOR DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

The largest umbrella review of its kind confirms physical activity is a first-line treatment – not a supplement – for mental health in adults.

PUBLISHED	SCOPE	STUDY TYPE	POPULATION
September 2023 – British Journal of Sports Medicine	97 Systematic Reviews Analyzed	Umbrella Review of Meta-Analyses	Adults with depression, anxiety, or psychological distress

KEY FINDINGS

Researchers analyzed 97 systematic reviews – each of which had already compiled results from hundreds of individual randomized controlled trials – to produce the most comprehensive assessment ever conducted on exercise and mental health. The conclusion: physical activity significantly reduces symptoms of depression, anxiety, and psychological distress across all adult populations studied. The effects were largest for depression, anxiety, and stress. Importantly, all types of physical activity worked – walking, resistance training, yoga, and aerobic exercise all produced meaningful mental health benefits. Higher intensity exercise produced larger effects, but even low-intensity movement made a measurable difference.

FOR YOUR FAMILY

The Takeaway: If someone in your household is struggling with mood, anxiety, or stress, movement is not a nice addition to their treatment – it is a treatment. The evidence now places exercise alongside therapy and medication as a clinically supported first-line option for mild to moderate depression and anxiety. A 30-minute walk, a strength session, or a yoga class is not self-care theater – it is medicine. Building consistent movement into your family's weekly rhythm is one of the most protective things you can do for everyone's mental health, including your own.

97

Systematic Reviews –

each analyzing hundreds of individual studies – all confirmed the same finding: physical activity significantly reduces depression, anxiety, and psychological distress in adults. Exercise is no longer a lifestyle recommendation. It is a clinical one.

Source: British Journal of Sports Medicine – September 2023, Umbrella Review of 97 meta-analyses

EATING TOGETHER AS A FAMILY REDUCES DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY IN TEENS

A representative study of nearly 650 adolescents links regular family meals directly to lower rates of depression, anxiety, and stress.

PUBLISHED	SCOPE	STUDY TYPE	POPULATION
February 2023 – Clinical Nutrition	649 Adolescents	Cross-Sectional Study	Adolescents aged 12–17 years

KEY FINDINGS

Researchers examined the relationship between family meal frequency and depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms in a representative sample of 649 adolescents aged 12 to 17. Every additional instance of social eating – whether with family or peers – measurably reduced the likelihood of depressive symptoms (OR = 0.83), anxiety symptoms (OR = 0.88), and stress symptoms (OR = 0.90). The protective effect held even after controlling for sociodemographic variables. The researchers attribute the benefit to a sense of belonging and perceived support – two central human needs that the shared table uniquely provides for adolescents navigating a difficult developmental period.

FOR YOUR FAMILY

The Takeaway: You do not need a perfect meal. You need a consistent table. The research does not specify what was served – it measures the act of sitting down together. A simple weeknight dinner, even with a busy schedule, is doing something measurable for your teenager's mental health. If your family is eating together fewer than three times per week, that is worth changing before almost any other intervention. The return on that investment – in mood, connection, and resilience – is backed by the data.

17%

Lower odds of depression in teens who regularly eat with their families – meaning every additional family meal measurably reduced the likelihood of depressive symptoms. A simpler or cheaper mental health intervention does not exist.

Source: Clinical Nutrition – February 2023, EHDLA Study, n=649 adolescents aged 12–17

Welcome to the Generation Strong Journal



Dr. Jackson Taylor, PT, DPT
Executive Director

Welcome to the May 2026 Generation Strong Journal. Last month we talked about the power of your environment – and this month's research takes that idea even further. Five studies, five different topics, and one unmistakable thread running through all of them: the most impactful things you can do for your family's health are hiding in plain sight.

This issue's five studies all pointed toward the same truth: sleep, movement, protein, shared meals, and time away from screens are not lifestyle preferences – they are clinical tools. The research is no longer emerging. It is settled. The question is whether we act on it.

Of everything in this issue, the research on family meals and teen mental health got my undivided attention. We are living through an adolescent mental health crisis – and here is a peer-reviewed study of nearly 650 teenagers telling us that simply eating together reduces depression, anxiety, and stress in measurable, statistically significant ways. No prescription. No program. Just a consistent seat at the table. If that doesn't reframe your dinner hour, I don't know what will.

About Generation Strong

Generation Strong exists for one reason: to empower families today so they can leave a legacy of health for generations to come. We educate, inspire, and guide families toward stronger lives through fitness, nutrition, and community – because we believe the habits built inside your home today will echo far beyond it.

This journal is one part of that mission. Each month, we take the best available research and turn it into something you can actually use – no wellness noise, no conflicting opinions, just clear, evidence-based guidance for the families who are ready to lead.



EDUCATION

Hundreds of educational videos on strength, nutrition, and health – and much more.



TRAINING

Comprehensive training programs built for every fitness level, so no one gets left behind.



COMMUNITY

Resources, Q&As, and everything your family needs to stay on track. All at generationstrong.org

Until next month – keep training, keep modeling, and keep showing up.

Dr. Jackson Taylor

Executive Director & Editor – Generation Strong