

Adolescent Habits Affect Adult Life

Patterns of behavior and thought from adolescence can affect your teen's brain for life. That's the conclusion of recent research, which indicates *the brain is not fully "wired" until about age 19.*

Duke University biological research psychologist Aaron White compares the 10- year-old brain to an overgrown garden with "hundreds of billions" of unruly neurons. These neurons make unnecessary or inappropriate connections. Much of the confusion takes place in the frontal lobe of the brain, the area that controls decision-making, planning, controlling emotions, and conveying ideas with language.

As the growing teenager makes choices and form habits of thought, behavior and speech, *pathways in the brain become established* and unused neural pathways dwindle.

This research could explain why some teens become adults with a sense of purpose and others don't. Or why some adults exercise while others don't. Teens are especially vulnerable to becoming dependent on tobacco, alcohol or other drugs, which affect the teen brain differently than the adult brain. If they don't use these substances by age 19, they probably won't as an adult. Teens who start using are *more likely to continue* or struggle with trying to quit throughout adulthood.

The developing teen, aged 10 through 20, needs peers and adults who model good choices, and an environment that supports and expects safe and healthy choices. Because age 19 seems to be the "*tipping point*", active and responsive parenting should continue through high school into the early years of college. These influences and patterns deeply influence the brain, which may adopt them as "*default settings*" for the rest of life.

Learn more about what's going on in the teen culture, and how to talk with your kids about drugs at www.theantidrug.com. You will find the newest information about Marijuana, drugged driving, Ecstasy, and warning signs of alcohol, tobacco and drug use.