

Long Island Interview - Linda Mandelbaum, The Teen Health Coach

By [Linda Tagliaferro](#), About.com Guide

Linda Mandelbaum



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Linda Mandelbaum

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Working to address the physical and emotional needs of adolescents, Linda Mandelbaum, HHC, AADP, LE, a Long Island, NY-based Certified Health Counselor, offers one-on-one counseling services that include dietary and nutritional counseling, personal goal setting, learning to have greater self-esteem, hands-on food preparation techniques and more. Working together, Ms. Mandelbaum and her clients create a plan to improve the quality of life for teens and tweens. She is available for counseling in her Great Neck, NY office, by phone or via [Skype](#).

About.com had the opportunity to interview Ms. Mandelbaum about her methods for enhancing her clients' lifestyles.

About.com: What do you consider the most difficult problems for teens and tweens today, and what are some methods that you use to help them overcome these challenges?

Linda Mandelbaum: Anxiety! The teen years are a time in life when people often first begin to experience various forms of anxiety: about food and body image, social anxiety, academic anxiety, etc. It's a time of crucial transition. Giving my clients tools to help empower them is my goal. Fence-sitting and lack of direction create anxiety. Solutions and steps towards taking action help to diminish anxiety and re-direct energy.

They may need to be empowered for different things but we find what they struggle with the most, at that moment, and we create actions to help with each challenge. If it's what to eat, we food shop together, cook, create meal plans, and create a clear list of go-to healthy snacks, for example. If it's being tired all the time then we create actions to help with that (assuming a doctor's physical has come back showing no underlying medical condition.)

For example, we can work together to create a bedtime ritual for clearing the mind and winding down from the day [with the help of] [herbal tea](#), [journaling](#), [essential oils](#), soft and soothing music, etc.

About.com: How do you help teens to understand the connection between their mood and the foods they eat?

Linda Mandelbaum: We explore a different food experiment each day of the week.... such as comparing a day with a sugary sweet breakfast to a healthy protein meal in the evening; eating vegetarian for an entire day; a no-processed food day, and other fun adventures. It's all about discover and changing their emotional triggers. All the while, I'll have my clients journaling their responses to each of these food experiments, both the good and the bad.

By experiencing how different foods and food combinations make them feel on different days, they can clearly see direct correlations in the foods they eat and their mood, how certain foods may boost their mood, and they will create new emotional connections that link healthy foods with feeling good.

And of course, we focus on the basics:

- Getting enough sleep
- Eating energy boosting, whole foods
- Minimizing intake of energy-sapping foods (sugar, processed foods)
- [Staying hydrated](#), drinking enough water
- Minimizing things that dehydrate you, like coffee and sodas
- Monitoring moods. is your bad mood draining your energy?
- Relationship. Are you in *healthy* relationships with friends, dating, family? Those relationships can feed *or* take away your energy levels.

About.com: What if a teen doesn't want to eat healthy foods like [salads](#), vegetables and fruits? What methods do you use to make those foods more palatable and attractive to them?

Linda Mandelbaum: [This is done...] through learning the importance of these foods. We food shop and pick things out together, creating a sampling platter. I find that teens like things parents might have assumed they wouldn't eat.

Changing how the food is prepared also helps quite a bit. I often teach teens and their parents alternative ways of preparing certain foods. Maybe the teen prefers something sautéed instead of steamed. We don't focus on the foods they won't eat, but rather, we celebrate the ones that they want to eat. I promise the list will grow.

About.com: How do you help teens overcome their fast food addictions?

Linda Mandelbaum: Teens will always love fast food. The key is educating them about what they're eating and coaching them to understand that fast food has minimal to no nutritional value. You'd be surprised at how many young adults and teens aren't aware that a hamburger and French fries from a fast food restaurant do not constitute a healthy meal.

Together, we come up with ideas for treats that are one hundred times better. Through working with me, they won't look at poisonous fast food as a treat any longer. Instead, they'll lean more towards an amazing organic kiwi or some dark chocolate or creamy almond butter. Their taste buds change and heal once they start to really taste the healthier foods and see how they affect their bodies.

About.com: What do you consider to be the most notorious saboteur of teen dietary health and how do you overcome this situation?

Linda Mandelbaum: Sugar. It is a drug! I've read that it can be compared to cocaine. withdrawal symptoms may occur. Developing a strategy ahead of time can help. Part of that is having our list of healthier go-to snack foods on hand, like a rice cake with something sweet on it, for example, almond butter, [brown rice syrup](#), honey or other natural alternatives. Another great substitute is a creamy, delicious [fruit smoothie](#).

Other tips for averting healthy diet saboteurs include stress-reducing activities, our vision boards, creative hobbies and journaling.

About.com: How do you foster self-esteem in teens?

Linda Mandelbaum: Working from the inside out, I help my teenage clients to identify their strengths, and we focus on highlighting these. We celebrate their successes and I focus on making sure that they feel special each time a landmark or goal is successfully met. We identify specific challenges and come up with strategies to deal with them.

I coach teens to:

- Embrace the things about themselves that they can't change and to learn fun self-care options. Sometimes we make our own custom blends of pampering products using essential oils and many other natural products.
- to change things about themselves that are in their control. We create vision boards so they can focus on the positive actions it will take to make important changes.
- Help to incorporate exercise into their lives using activities that they're most responsive to. I suggest simple physical activities like jumping rope or walking a certain number of steps each day. We come up with a plan of action, complete with follow-up coaching and reports of their experiences. This builds confidence, motivation and physical energy.
- I often buy little gifts for a client, like a jump rope or pedometer. Other gifts may include food samples, books, a journal, containers for them to take home specific foods, and other fun stuff.

About.com: What are some methods that you use to encourage teens to set goals?

Linda Mandelbaum: The first thing I do is ask them for their three wishes. We then set goals during each session with some action steps to help move towards and achieve these goals.

To learn more or to make an appointment with Linda Mandelbaum, please visit her site at www.theteenhealthcoach.com or visit her Facebook page at www.facebook.com/mindhealthnutrition.