The Five Essential Habits of Healthy Teens video presentation opens with the program’s host challenging viewers with a question: “What if you could change just a few things you do and make a really big difference in your life? Would you?” she asks. She tells viewers that research indicates that once healthy habits are formed, a person’s performance improves. Making a healthy difference in our lives basically comes down to five things, viewers are told as the program’s title, The Five Essential Habits of Healthy Teens, crashes down behind the host.

For some, learning a “healthy habit” might be an unfamiliar concept. The host compares developing a new habit to shaping and molding a piece of clay. The process is explained as animation shows a lump of clay being shaped and reshaped into different forms. Some complex habits—such as learning to play the guitar—may take time to form. But simple habits—like getting up a half-hour earlier each morning to exercise—can become reality in just a few short weeks.

The first habit discussed is eating a nutritious diet. At this point, Dr. Christopher Mohr, an expert in nutrition and health, is introduced. “Sounds simple, doesn’t it?” he asks. He explains that few teens manage to master this particular essential habit without working on it. As Mohr walks through a farmer’s market in New York City, he points out some of the healthy, locally produced foods and explains the benefits of each. Whole grains, for instance, provide energy and enhance the immune system. Many teens eat diets high in sugary foods and soft drinks, so Mohr points out that natural juices and fruits are a much healthier alternative.

Next, we see Mohr at a mall, quizzing several teenagers about their sugar consumption. Most of the teens don’t have a clue about how much sugar they consume. “Do you have any idea how much sugar a teenager eats on a yearly basis?” Mohr asks. Unveiling a 100-pound sack of sugar, he tells the shocked teens that this is about the same amount of sugar that the average teen consumes in a year.

Essential habit number two is to start each day with a healthy breakfast. The host reminds viewers that breakfast truly is the most important meal of the day. The advantages for teens include performing better in school and having more energy. The video then cuts to Mohr in a kitchen surrounded by common breakfast cereals. He explains the importance of reading the nutrition labels on the foods we eat. As an easy alternative to cereal, Mohr shows viewers how to make a nutritious breakfast smoothie drink. Mohr stresses that it’s essential to get something nutritious in your stomach for each meal, even if it’s a nontraditional choice such as a vegetable omelet for dinner.

Number three on the list of essential habits is daily exercise. New dietary guidelines recommend at least 60 minutes of exercise a day, viewers are told. This doesn’t mean strenuous weight lifting; it simply means being active during the day. Mohr returns on
camera, at a soccer field. He explains that there are many different ways to get an hour’s worth of activity each day. While team sports are a great way to exercise, it’s not essential for a teen’s physical activity to be crammed into one single chunk of time each day.

The benefits of regular physical activity are outlined for viewers. These include maintaining body weight and improving mental performance. The three elements of exercise are identified and described: aerobic endurance, muscular strength and flexibility. We see examples of each. When it comes to exercise, the most important thing is to stick with it, hang out with friends who are physically active and remain open to trying new things.

With their demanding social and academic schedules, many teens often miss out on essential habit number four: getting sufficient sleep. As the title for this habit crashes down behind the host, she lists some common misperceptions about sleep, such as the possibility of catching up on missed sleep during weekends. “Teenagers need at least eight hours of quality sleep,” she says, but most aren’t getting this amount. Mohr interviews an expert at a sleep lab devoted to studying the sleep habits of teens. The sleep expert details some of the real health problems that can arise from a lack of sleep. Suggestions are given for how teens can best achieve an adequate amount of sleep.

The host introduces the final essential habit: staying away from drugs. Of all of the essential habits, this is the most important because drugs like cigarettes, alcohol and abused prescription drugs can be lethal. While a certain amount of risk taking is normal for teens, the host explains, taking risks with drugs is not a healthy or useful choice. Drug use can quickly become an addiction and ruin a teen’s ability to effectively cope with his or her problems.

At this point in the program, real teens coping with drug addiction in a rehab setting are interviewed by Mohr. Their stories are compelling and cautionary, and serve to emphasize how “casual” drug use can quickly evolve into a major addiction that will change a teen’s life forever. The video draws to a close as the five essential habits of healthy teens are recapped for viewers.