# Gen Z Health: What Is Better, What Is Worse, and Why

Name Date Class

## Reading

1 Picture a 24-year-old at a friend's birthday party. She orders a sparkling water, checks her watch to see how well she slept the night before, and later watches a stranger's video about whether a stomach ache is worth worrying about. Her parents, at the same age, might have ordered a beer, ignored their sleep, and visited a doctor only when something was clearly wrong. Is her generation healthier than theirs? Generation Z, usually defined as people born between 1997 and 2012, is **scrutinized** constantly, and the honest answer is that it depends on what you measure. In some areas, young people are doing better than their parents did. In others, the figures are worrying.

2 Start with the good news. Young adults are **abstaining** from alcohol in unusual numbers. In a long-running American poll, only about half of adults aged 18 to 34 said in 2025 that they drink at all, fewer than among older adults, and about two in three of them believed that even moderate drinking harms health. Cigarette smoking among American teenagers has also fallen to the lowest level ever recorded. Nobody knows exactly why, but researchers suggest a mix of changing attitudes, less socializing in person, and the cost of a night out. There is a **caveat**, though. Nicotine vapes have gained a **foothold** among young adults, and pouches are a newer worry, so the habit may be changing form rather than disappearing.

3 The worrying news starts with the mind. A review of British studies that followed people born between 1946 and 2002 found that teenagers born in the early 2000s reported more mental ill health than earlier generations did at the same age. American data fit the picture. The share of high school students reporting **persistent** sadness or hopelessness climbed through the 2010s, peaked at 42 percent in 2021, and fell to 33 percent in 2025, which is encouraging but still higher than in 2015. Girls report far more distress than boys. Part of the rise may reflect a fading **stigma**, because people who feel able to talk about distress are more likely to report it. The role of smartphones and social media is **contentious**, and researchers also point to pressures such as economic insecurity.

4 The body tells a mixed story, too. Worldwide, obesity among children and adolescents has more than **quadrupled** since 1990. A global estimate covering the years up to 2016 found that about four in five adolescents did not get the hour of daily exercise that the World Health Organization recommends, and in 2025 only about one American high school student in four reported sleeping at least eight hours on school nights. A **sedentary**, indoor childhood may also affect eyesight. In parts of East and Southeast Asia, as many as eight in ten young adults have **myopia**, or nearsightedness, and too little time outdoors is widely thought to be one reason. A large review of studies in China found that children who spent more time outside had about a quarter lower risk.

5 Cancer offers a third signal, though a less certain one. Bowel cancer in adults under 50 has been rising in more than half of the 50 countries covered by a large 2024 study, and South Korea has one of the highest rates in that age group. Most of the people in that study were born long before Gen Z, and the risk for young adults remains low, so it is too early to say what the trend means for today's twenty-year-olds. Scientists have not **pinpointed** the cause. Obesity, diet, and changes in gut bacteria are among the leading suspects. Doctors do agree on one practical point: lasting changes in bowel habits, or blood in the stool, deserve a medical check at any age, however embarrassing they feel.

6 Habits are changing as well. Surveys by companies and consultancies suggest that social media is among the first places many Gen Z adults look for health advice, far more than older generations do. That has real benefits, such as making private topics easier to discuss, but it also spreads **misinformation**, because anyone can **go viral** with a confident claim, and creators who are paid by views are not always rewarded for being careful. A sensible habit is to ask who is speaking and what **credentials** they hold, to compare the claim with a national health service or a major hospital, and to see a professional before changing your diet or medication because of a video.

7 None of this settles the question, because a generation's health story is far from finished. The oldest members of Gen Z reach 30 in 2027, around the age when many long-term conditions begin to appear. Over the next twenty years, we will find out whether fewer drinks and cigarettes can **outweigh** less sleep, less exercise, and more anxiety.

## Vocabulary Matching

*Match each word from the reading with its meaning. Write the letter on the line.*

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **scrutinized** | _____ | **A** | deliberately choosing not to do something |
| 2 | **abstaining** | _____ | **B** | spread very quickly online to many people |
| 3 | **caveat** | _____ | **C** | qualifications that prove someone's ability |
| 4 | **foothold** | _____ | **D** | involving much sitting and little movement |
| 5 | **persistent** | _____ | **E** | increased to four times the size |
| 6 | **stigma** | _____ | **F** | be greater in value or importance than |
| 7 | **contentious** | _____ | **G** | continuing for a long time without stopping |
| 8 | **quadrupled** | _____ | **H** | a warning that limits a general statement |
| 9 | **sedentary** | _____ | **I** | likely to cause strong disagreement |
| 10 | **myopia** | _____ | **J** | found the exact cause or location of |
| 11 | **pinpointed** | _____ | **K** | false or inaccurate information that spreads |
| 12 | **misinformation** | _____ | **L** | a secure first position from which to grow |
| 13 | **go viral** | _____ | **M** | a mark of shame attached to something |
| 14 | **credentials** | _____ | **N** | examined very closely and critically |
| 15 | **outweigh** | _____ | **O** | difficulty seeing things that are far away |

## Fill in the Blank

*Choose a word from the box to complete each sentence. Use each word once. The words are already in the correct form.*

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **abstaining** | **caveat** | **contentious** | **credentials** | **foothold** | **misinformation** | **myopia** | **outweigh** |
| **persistent** | **pinpointed** | **quadrupled** | **scrutinized** | **sedentary** | **stigma** | | |

1 The new law was _____ by journalists looking for hidden problems.

2 He is _____ from alcohol for a month to improve his sleep.

3 The offer is generous, with one _____ : you must decide by Friday.

4 The small brand finally gained a _____ in the European market.

5 She has a _____ cough that has lasted for weeks.

6 Many people avoid seeking help because of the _____ attached to mental illness.

7 The _____ debate about school phones divided parents and teachers.

8 Over ten years, the town's population _____ from 5,000 to 20,000.

9 Sitting at a desk all day is a _____ way to live.

10 Children with _____ often struggle to see the board from the back of the class.

11 After weeks of tests, the doctors finally _____ the cause of the illness.

12 Fact-checkers try to correct online _____ before it spreads.

13 Before hiring him, they checked his _____ and his work history.

14 For most people, the benefits of exercise _____ the risks.

## Comprehension Questions

*Answer in your notebook or discuss with a partner. Questions 10 to 12 are IELTS-style.*

1 What scene opens the reading, and what question does it raise?

2 Which two changes in behavior does paragraph 2 describe, and what caveat does the writer add?

3 What does the American survey show about persistent sadness among high school students from 2015 to 2025?

4 Why might part of the rise in reported distress not be a real increase?

5 Which signs of poorer physical health does paragraph 4 mention, and which of them is linked to time spent outdoors?

6 Why does the writer call the bowel cancer trend a less certain signal for Gen Z than the other evidence?

7 What advice does the reading give for judging health advice on social media, and why is each part of that advice useful?

8 The writer mentions both smartphones and economic insecurity. What does this suggest about how to explain differences between generations?

9 The reading moves from good news to worrying news to habits. How does this order shape the final judgment, and is the closing question fair?

**IELTS-Style Questions**

10 **True, False, or Not Given:** *"Researchers agree that smartphones are the main cause of the rise in distress among young people."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

11 **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer believes that Gen Z's health cannot yet be judged simply as better or worse than that of earlier generations."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

12 **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer begin with a 24-year-old at a birthday party? Is its purpose to prove a statistic, to give a recognizable picture of the contrast between generations, or something else?

## True or False

*Circle T (true) or F (false) according to the reading. Write a correction for each false statement on the dotted line.*

1 **T / F** The writer says the answer to whether Gen Z is healthier depends on what you measure.

2 **T / F** In the American poll, about two in three adults aged 18 to 34 believed that moderate drinking harms health.

3 **T / F** The writer says researchers have proved exactly why young people drink less.

4 **T / F** American high school students reported more persistent sadness in 2025 than in 2021.

5 **T / F** The writer says part of the rise in distress may reflect people feeling more able to talk about it.

6 **T / F** The reading says obesity among children and adolescents has increased worldwide since 1990.

7 **T / F** In 2025, most American high school students reported sleeping at least eight hours on school nights.

8 **T / F** The bowel cancer study found rising rates in fewer than half of the countries it covered.

9 **T / F** The writer recommends comparing a social media health claim with a national health service or a major hospital.

10 **T / F** The writer says the oldest members of Gen Z will turn 40 in 2027.

## Discussion Questions

*Talk with a partner or in a small group. The questions move from personal to more abstract.*

1. How do you look after your health in daily life? Is it different from what your parents did at your age?
2. Do you drink alcohol, or do you know people your age who choose not to? What reasons do they give?
3. How much sleep do you get on a normal weeknight, and what usually stops you from getting more?
4. Do you use a watch, an app, or another device to track your health? Does it change what you do?
5. Where do you usually look first when you have a health question? How do you decide whether to trust what you find?
6. Is it easy or difficult to talk openly about stress and anxiety with friends and family in your country? Why?
7. Do young people in your country spend enough time outdoors? What gets in the way?
8. The reading says scientists have not found the cause of rising bowel cancer in adults under 50. How should people decide what to do when experts do not yet know the cause?
9. Young adults seem to be drinking and smoking less, but sleeping less and exercising less. Which change matters more for long-term health, in your view?
10. Some people say rising reports of distress mainly reflect more openness, while others say they reflect real change. What evidence would help you decide?
11. Should governments limit teenagers' use of smartphones and social media, or is that a job for families? Give reasons.
12. Should creators who give health advice online be held legally responsible for its accuracy? What problems might that cause?
13. A generation's health may depend on its economy, its schools, and its culture as well as on personal choices. Which of these do you think matters most?
14. Is it fair to describe a whole generation with one label such as Gen Z, given how different countries and families are?

**Language Focus: Auxiliary Verbs in Comparisons**

After than and as, English often uses an auxiliary verb (do, does, did, have, has, is, are) instead of repeating the main verb. The auxiliary shows the tense of the comparison.

**In the reading:**

- "In some areas, young people are doing better than their parents **did**."
- "…reported more mental ill health than earlier generations **did** at the same age."
- "…many Gen Z adults look for health advice, far more than older generations **do**."

**Practice:** Complete the sentence with the correct auxiliary verb: *"Teenagers today sleep less than their grandparents ____ at the same age."*

**Activities and speed challenge**
englishbridges.com/lessons/gen-z-health

**Notes**