

# HEALTHY EATING FOR TEENAGERS



Irregular eating, meal skipping and experimentation with different diets and foods are part of being a teenager. Many of these habits will just be a passing fad – so it's important to keep food in perspective.

Parents who enjoy a wide variety of foods and the social aspects of eating and mealtimes are likely to pass on positive messages about the importance of food to their children. Teens are still growing and developing so it is more important to eat well, not smoke and exercise regularly than to be thin. Girls who diet have been shown to have diets very low in many important nutrients.

Recent research shows that teenagers' diets can be too high in sugars and salt and too low in calcium. Many have very low intakes of iron and some teenagers also have low intakes of vitamin A, folate (an important B vitamin), vitamin D and zinc which can impact on healthy growth and development.

## An example menu

A suitable menu has to combine what teenagers want to eat and what they need to eat for healthy growth and development. This is an example:

### Breakfast

Bowl of fortified wholegrain cereal like wheat biscuits or unsweetened muesli and 1% or semi-skimmed milk with fruit (fresh/tinned in juice/dried/frozen) • Wholegrain bread or toast with peanut butter or boiled egg • Water

### Mid-morning

Glass of semi-skimmed milk • Fruit

### Lunch

Lean grilled beefburger, baked potato, salad and baked beans • Unsweetened yogurt (low fat) with nuts, seeds • Water/fruit juice 150ml/ flavoured milk

### Mid-afternoon

Oatcakes with low fat cream cheese, cherry tomatoes and cucumber • Milk/water

### Evening meal

Wholegrain rice with meat/fish, vegetables or salad • Stewed fruit/ crumble with low fat custard • Beans or lentils • Water

### Evening Snack

Vegetable soup • Bowl of fortified wholegrain cereal like wheat biscuits and muesli and 1% or semi-skimmed milk



# Top tips to stay healthy

The way we treat our bodies during the teenage years can really affect the way we look and feel now and later in life. Weetabix has devised these top tips to help keep you healthy and looking feeling amazing, inside and out!

## Calcium

40% of your peak bone mass is laid down during adolescence. To compensate for increased needs, adequate dietary calcium is critical. If calcium intake is deficient, teenagers may have an increased risk from osteoporosis (brittle bones) in later life. Many teenage girls avoid dairy products. Choosing the reduced fat varieties e.g. 1% or skimmed milk rather than whole, still provides an excellent source of calcium. Other dietary sources of calcium include dairy products, fortified bread and cereals, nuts, fish with soft bones and green leafy vegetables.

## Breakfast

Research has shown that missing breakfast can impair both your mental and physical performance. Research has also shown that fortified breakfast cereals make an important contribution to teenagers' vitamin and mineral intake especially when eaten with milk which provides calcium. Breakfast cereals make an ideal snack any time of the day, not just for breakfast.

## Energy for exams

Feeling run down? Improve your energy levels by replacing soft drinks and fast food with fresh fruit, vegetables and whole grains. Avoid missing or skipping meals as this can lead to lower energy levels, making you feel tired and unable to concentrate.

## Exercise

Research shows that by the age of 15 years, a third of boys, and over half of teenage girls exercise less than twice a week – whilst more than a third of 15 year old boys and girls watch more than four hours television a day. Lack of activity is a major contributor to being overweight and teenagers who exercise regularly report greater confidence and feel healthier.

Exercise is a great way of toning up and keeping fit. Choose a sport you really like and try to play it once or twice a week. Even walking to your friend's house can make all the difference.



**Remember:**  
The key to a healthy diet is balance; eating more of foods like fruit and vegetables and less of those high in fat, salt and sugar. Energy (measured as calories or kilojoules) in the diet should come from a wide variety of foods that contain other nutrients such as protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals. As for all of us, it is important for teenagers to drink enough fluid. Milk and water are recommended. A small glass of fruit juice (limit to 150ml per day) can be included for one meal time per day. Sweet, fizzy drinks provide no other nutrients beside energy (calories) and can contribute to tooth decay.



## Fibre

Fibre is important to maintain a healthy digestive system. Boost your fibre intake by eating more fruit and vegetables, wholegrain bread, wholegrain fortified breakfast cereal, brown rice, wholemeal pasta and potatoes with skin.

Remember to keep active and drink plenty of water.

## Folic acid

Folic acid is important for normal cell development and healthy blood. Sources of folic acid include fortified breakfast cereals, leafy green vegetables and unsweetened orange juice (limit to 150ml serving per day).

## Fruit and vegetables

We all need to eat more fruit and vegetables and should aim to eat at least five portions a day. Fresh, tinned (in juice), dried and frozen varieties all count, even a glass of fruit juice (150ml) counts as one portion.

A portion is about the size of your clenched fist.

## Iron

Iron is important for healthy blood, a healthy immune system and mental performance. Dietary sources include meat, fish, poultry, beans, eggs, green leafy vegetables and fortified breakfast cereals.

## Missing meals

Skipping meals can lead to a lower energy intake, leaving you lethargic and unable to concentrate, and could have you reaching for high fat, high sugar foods. Establishing a more regular eating pattern will keep the body topped up.

Choose healthier snacks such as sandwiches, fruit, nuts, oatcakes, milk and unsweetened yoghurts.

## Pearly all-whites

Lack of calcium in the diet can lead to brittle bones and make teeth and bones weaker. For a superstar smile, choose calcium rich foods like dairy products, green leafy vegetables, fortified bread and breakfast cereals.

## Protein

Protein provides the building blocks in the body for growth, renewal and repair.

Most people remember there are animal sources such as meat, fish, eggs and dairy foods like milk, but can forget there are plant based sources too such as nuts, beans, pulses like lentils, and cereals like wholewheat.

People need to eat protein throughout the day to keep muscles healthy. Research has shown that protein helps to make you feel full.

## Salt

A high intake of salt may contribute to the risk of high blood pressure and other health problems.

- Cut down on the consumption of processed, convenience, snack and fast foods.
- Choose lower salt varieties.
- Avoid adding salt to cooking or at the table.

## Spot the difference

Eating plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables can make a real difference. Drinking lots of water can also help keep your skin healthy.

## Teenage heartache

By just cutting down on salt found in many processed foods you can reduce the risk of high blood pressure.

## Trying to diet, dying to try it!

We should try to avoid irregular eating and meal skipping. Experimentation with different foods is normal, but it's better to eat well, not smoke and exercise regularly than be thin!

## Veggie good friends

Follow the example of many famous veggies and be careful not to cut out protein, iron and vitamins from your diet. Choose nuts, seeds, beans and lentils.

To find out more information, contact the Vegetarian Society.

## Vegetarian

If you eat a vegetarian diet it can be a very healthy way of eating, but many teenagers adopt a vegetarian diet with little or no guidance. This can result in missing out on protein, iron and other vitamins e.g. B12 if not replaced appropriately.

