

## **Healthy eating: What adolescents need?**

*Article written from information from;*

*Paper written by Jo Lewin - Associate nutritionist for BBC good food guide, information from the following websites; [www.webmd.boots.com](http://www.webmd.boots.com), [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org). and [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)*

*All recipes available on the BBC good food web site <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com>*

The teenage years are key for experimentation which, with regards to food, can be used to your advantage. You can introduce new foods and might be pleasantly surprised when your teen eats things they wouldn't previously touch. It is at this age that teens might become more interested in cooking and begin to learn how to cook independently. With it, this brings about a new understanding of food, which yields many positives as long as teenagers are taught the importance of a balanced diet and good nutrition.

Teenagers today have a lot to contend with; exams, stress, exposure to unrealistic body shapes, fast food choices, alcohol and technology, not to mention the whirlwind of hormones, emotions and body changes that play havoc with confidence and wellbeing. The adolescent years are physically dominated by the production of sex hormones such as oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone, which bring about all sorts of physical and emotional changes. The teenage body typically undergoes a growth spurt and changes shape, all of which requires energy, vitamins and minerals.

### **Some facts**

#### **Calories**

Adolescents need more daily calories than at any other point in their lives. Recommended is 2,800 calories each day for teenage boys and 2,200 daily calories for teen girls. These caloric needs are greater for teens who are also athletes or in certain stages of development: "A 12-year-old going through puberty is going to need more calories, and have higher nutrient needs than another teen at that age who has not yet reached puberty,".

#### **Calcium is critical**

Calcium, critical for bone development and density, is one of the nutrients that can easily be overlooked. Calcium needs are higher than ever during the teen years - 800mg a day for girls (aged 11-18) and 1,000mg a day for boys (aged 11-18). Yet calcium consumption often drops off in teenagers as they replace milk with fizzy drinks. Research shows that 14- and 15-year-old girls who drink fizzy drinks are three times as likely to suffer a bone fracture than those who do not drink them.

For calcium to have an effect - you also need vitamin D. Vitamin D mostly comes from safe exposure to the summer sun, plus some foods - including oily fish and fortified spreads.

It is hard to get the daily amount of vitamin D needed from food, so most adults and children aged 4 and over are asked to consider taking a supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D every day during autumn and winter.

Teenagers require the calcium equivalent of about four 225ml (8fl oz) glasses of milk daily. Here are some other foods that supply as much calcium as a glass of milk:

- 225g (8oz) yoghurt
- 40g (1 1/2oz) hard cheese
- 225ml (8fl oz) calcium-added orange juice
- 450g (16oz) low-fat cottage cheese.

### **Iron**

Iron also provides a key role in cell replication, so it's essential for both boys and girls to eat enough to meet their growth needs. Rapid growth, coupled with lifestyle and poor dietary choices, can result in iron-deficiency anaemia which can make teen's look and feel tired or breathless, experience poor concentration and affect mental and physical development.

Part of red blood cells functioning is to transport oxygen to every cell in the body, iron fuels red blood cells. It's crucial for a teen's brain function, immunity and energy level. Girls between 11 and 18 years old need about 15mg per day. Boys in the same age range need about 11mg.

Iron deficiency is common in adolescent's who limit or avoid meat. Menstruating young women are at increased risk of an iron shortfall because their diets may not contain enough iron-rich foods to make up for monthly losses. Iron is found in both animal and plant foods. The iron in animal foods is better absorbed by the body, but consuming a vitamin C rich food along with iron from a plant source increases its uptake. Serve these iron-rich animal foods to your teen as part of a balanced diet (aim for 115-175g/4-6oz a day):

- Beef, Poultry, Pork, Clams, Oysters, Eggs
- Good non-meat sources of iron include: Vegetables (including spinach, green peas and asparagus) Beans, Nuts, Iron-fortified breads, cereal, rice and pasta.

### **Multivitamins**

A multivitamin with 100% or less of the recommended nutrient intake (RNI) for iron, vitamins C and D, and other nutrients can help fill in the gaps in diets which may be nutrient deficient. However, multivitamins may not contain enough calcium to make up for inadequate consumption of calcium-rich foods. Your teen may need a calcium supplement too.

Phosphorous, potassium, magnesium, vitamin A and D are the other essentials required for the healthy diet for teenagers.

Unless blood tests and/or a doctors or paediatrician's evaluation reveal a specific deficiency, it's preferable to obtain nutrients from food instead of from dietary supplements.

### **Store cupboard essentials and snacks:**

A lot of the time, your teenager will want to graze or grab a quick snack. The trick is to ensure there is healthy, but delicious food available when they want it. Make sure there is plenty of choice – treats like good quality chocolate, dried fruit and unsalted nuts as well as plenty of foods that provide goodness as a snack or a more substantial meal which can be put together in no more than ten minutes. See

[https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/search/recipes?query#sort=created&order=desc&path=course/lunch/time/\[0+TO+600](https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/search/recipes?query#sort=created&order=desc&path=course/lunch/time/[0+TO+600) for ideas.

Snack on ideas; (These healthy snacks also double as quick breakfasts)

- Multi-grain bagel spread with peanut butter and topped with raisins
- Leftover pizza 115g
- (8oz) low-fat fruited yoghurt with granary toast
- Fruit and yoghurt smoothie with granary toast
- Hard-boiled eggs in a granary roll
- Snacks made from low- sugar cereal, dried fruits, chopped nuts or roasted soya beans and mini chocolate chips
- Sandwiches on granary bread
- Hummus or peanut butter and multigrain crackers
- Bowl of multigrain cereal
- Vegetables and low-fat yoghurt dip
- Reduced-fat mozzarella cheese sticks and low-fat crackers
- Microwave popcorn topped with grated Parmesan cheese;
- Yoghurt with multi-grain cereal mixed in
- Low-fat cottage cheese and multigrain crackers or granary toast
- Nuts

### **Main meals**

When it comes to main meals, have a few staples such as whole-wheat pasta or noodles and wholegrain bread which teens can transform. A low-sugar breakfast cereal or porridge oats are useful so that they have a proper breakfast - topped off with a chopped banana, a handful of berries or an apple and some natural yogurt.

Keep a stash of ready-to-eat fish in the fridge or freezer, or canned varieties for topping wholemeal toast or making fish cakes. Eggs are another essential standby – boiled, poached or in an omelette or frittata they make an easy, nutritious dish. The more you encourage teenagers to eat at home, the less chance there is of them eating in fast food outlets or skipping meals altogether.

## **Eating for your skin**

Spotty skin is the cause of much teenage angst, so it might be that your teen can be persuaded to eat more healthily on the grounds of vanity if nothing else! It is a myth that chocolate causes spots and that dairy products block the pores. What the skin does need is plenty of hydration and enough replenishing nutrients, such as zinc, vitamin C and iron. Antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids are also essential and can be consumed through a combination of vegetables, fruit, nuts, seeds and oily fish. Oily fish are also a rich supplier of protein, essential for growth and development.

## **Breakfast**

Teens lead busy lives, and between school, part-time jobs, extracurricular activities and an active social life, they often don't take time to sit down for a morning meal. According to the Healthy Children website, by the time kids hit adolescence, about 30 percent of them no longer eat breakfast. But skimping on early morning fuel-up session can take a toll on a teenager's health. 25% of your daily calories should come from breakfast.

Even teens convinced of the merits of a healthy breakfast can still be reluctant to take the time for a full sit-down meal. Fortunately, there are plenty of on-the-go breakfast options for teens that give the same benefits without the time sink. A bowl of healthy breakfast cereal with milk provides a wide range of vitamins and minerals. For teens who don't even have time for cereal, a healthy breakfast bar, a piece of fruit or a bag of trail mix prepared the night before can provide valuable calories and nutrients to fuel the day's activities.

## **Comfort eating and weight management**

Our teenager's relationship with food is an important one - comfort eating often signifies their emotions are in turmoil. The best way to encourage teenagers to have a comfortable relationship with food is to eat with them as much as possible and teach them simple nutritional knowledge as well as cooking skills. Teenagers sometimes develop anxieties around sweet food which they perceive as being fattening. Help them build their confidence by introducing wholesome and healthy sweet dishes such as:

- Banana & walnut loaf
- Honey, parsnip & coconut cake
- Leftover veg & orange cake
- Better beetroot brownies

If you are concerned for your child's weight and want to try and support them without scaring or upsetting them, consider the following:

- Hydration plays a big part so get them to drink enough water throughout the day
- Teach them five quick dishes they can make for themselves, even a sandwich is a good option! Lunchbox mains.
- Encourage them to only eat at mealtimes, if they need a snack try raw vegetables, stewed fruits and natural yogurt, dried fruit, unsalted nuts or healthier versions of a flapjack like sunshine bars, on-the-run breakfast bars and cinnamon berry granola bars.
- Keep to three meals a day plus fruit or veggie snacks. Insist on eating a healthy breakfast, even if it's just a banana and yogurt or a smoothie. This will improve moods and energy and make them less inclined to snack.
- Encourage them to create balanced meals and snacks which include plenty of vegetables and salad, lean protein such as chicken and fish and complex starchy carbohydrates such as rice, oats, grains and potatoes.
- Don't ban foods just encourage moderation, and try not to enforce the view that food is a reward or treat, because this creates an emotional tie to food.
- Stay positive about food. If you can instil a basic love and appreciation of food rather than allowing it to become the enemy, you will have more chance of them developing bodies they are happy and comfortable with for the rest of their lives.

### **Diet for ADHD**

For years, doctors have speculated that certain foods may have something to do with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD. Much research has been done on the subject of a helpful diet for ADHD, but according to the Mayo Clinic, experts don't believe that foods actually cause ADHD. What some foods seem to do, however, is worsen ADHD symptoms or cause behaviour that mimics the signs of ADHD in teens.

Some evidence suggests that teens with ADHD may have low levels of essential fatty acids. However, early studies have not consistently concluded that supplementation of omega-3 fatty acids in the diets of teens with ADHD will improve behaviour. Omega-3 fatty acids affect the transmissions of some neurotransmitters (brain chemicals). While a balance of omega-3 fatty acids and omega-6 fatty acids is best for overall health, the typical UK diet contains too few omega-3s.

The general dietary recommendations for teens are to include fruits and vegetables, whole grains, bean, lean meat, and fish.

Many parents wonder if artificial food additives and colourings contribute to ADHD. Though the causes of ADHD are still unknown, you can try removing the sources of artificial colourings and food additives, including sugar-sweetened drinks, sweets, and colourful cereals, and determine if your child's behaviour improves. Eliminate processed food products, and instead provide a wholesome diet of fresh, healthy foods to optimise the health and well-being of your child.

Be aware that mega doses of vitamins and minerals can be toxic to a teen and can interact with ADHD pills. To date, there is little consistent evidence that ADHD can be treated with nutritional supplements. Again, aim for a balanced diet that includes a variety of fresh, whole foods.