

## Tips for Parents: Teenage Tastes

*Your teenager may be in need of a meal-time makeover, but may not possess the nutrition know-how to get started. Healthy eating patterns are especially important for teens, and you can help them make the right choices.*

### **Taking it one step at a time**

**First, a balanced diet is crucial.** Don't forget to stress the four basic food groups. Serve a variety of foods every day to ensure a balanced diet.

### **A daily balanced diet for teens**

**Begin the day with breakfast.** If typical breakfast foods aren't appealing, try serving something they like, no matter how odd it seems. There's nothing wrong with pasta, soup, or even pizza at seven in the morning.

Try this quick yogurt fruit breakfast shake:

In a blender, combine  
½ cup milk or soy milk  
½ cup plain yogurt  
½ frozen banana  
4 strawberries  
1 tsp. honey  
2 tablespoons oat bran

**Pack a well-balanced lunch.** Include fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meat, poultry or fish, and low fat milk, cheese, or yogurt.

**Pack only healthy desserts or snacks.** Instead of buying sweets, help your teenagers to learn to make their own with less sugar and fat.

**Fat in the diet is okay.** There's nothing wrong with a burger and a small order of fries at lunch as long as you keep the fat content of other meals low for that day.

**Keep on snacking.** Teenagers need increased amounts of calories so they may actually require a snack. Try fruits, low fat yogurt, rice cakes, pretzels, or juice as a between meal snack.

### **Eating well and learning better**

**Good nutrition promotes health and healthy kids learn better.** Poorly nourished children are more likely to be sick, absent from school, and therefore, miss out on learning.

**A healthy kid has the energy needed to learn.** Children who do not get enough food (or eat the proper foods) do not have the energy to get through the school day.

**Healthy kids learn from their environment.** Poorly nourished children lack energy to learn and play, and communicate less with their peers.

**Good nutrition provides building blocks for the brain.** School-aged children with iron deficiencies, for example, may show a lack of attention in the classroom and have learning disabilities.

**You should know that...**

- Too much sugar interferes with learning by reducing the ability to concentrate and reducing short-term memory. Avoid candy, cookies, soft drinks, and canned fruit in heavy syrup.
- Caffeine interferes with a child's ability to sit still and concentrate. Avoid caffeine-containing foods like coffee, tea, cocoa, chocolate, and colas.
- Additives like artificial flavoring, coloring, and preservatives are suspected of interfering with the ability to concentrate and pay attention.

**Beyond the kitchen**

**Read and learn about nutrition.** Once you learn the basics about proper nutrition and healthier food alternatives, you and your family can begin to live a healthier, more productive life.

**Serve as a role model.** Demonstrate the importance of good eating habits by eating healthy yourself. Once you learn about proper nutrition, invite family members to help in planning healthy meals. This is one way children can learn first-hand the importance of a well balanced diet. Remember developing new habits takes time and awareness. Be patient. By the end of the semester, your teens will be healthier on the inside and look their best on the outside.

For more information:

**Web links:**

[http://www.nutrition.gov/index.php?mode=fulltext&mode2=info\\_for&audience=Adolescents](http://www.nutrition.gov/index.php?mode=fulltext&mode2=info_for&audience=Adolescents)

<http://www.betterhealthusa.com/public/268.cfm>

<http://library.thinkquest.org/10991/index.html>

**Books:**

Beck, Leslie. "Healthy Eating for Preteens and Teens". Penguin Global, 2007.

Nissenberg, Sandra; Pearl, Barbara N. "Eating Right from 8 to 18: Nutrition Solutions for Parents". Wiley, 2002.

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