

Basic teenager alimentation and right nutritional attitudes

What do the teenagers eat?

In the school, we conducted a questionnaire which involved 100 students of 1st, 2nd and 3rd year.

On average, they eat 2 to 3 meals per day, and breakfast is important and they consume it every day (87% of the students).

60% of them drink at least 2 l water per day, 29% of them sometimes drink sweet fizzy drinks. 66% drinks coffee on regular basis.

The top five snacks are: chips, fruit, chocolate, frozen snacks, and yogurt.

The top five meals are: pizza, pasta, fried chicken, hamburgers/cheeseburgers and french fries.

What are the teenagers supposed to eat?

Teenagers go through big physical changes in puberty. They need extra nutrition to fuel these physical changes, which means they need to eat healthy food.

The child's level of physical activity and stage of development determine exactly how much healthy food they need. Sometimes, the child has a bigger appetite, which is their body's way of telling them to eat more.

Healthy food for pre-teen and teenage children includes a wide variety of fresh foods from the five food groups. Each food group has different nutrients, which child's body needs to grow and work properly. That's why they need to eat a range of foods from across all five food groups.

1. vegetables
2. fruit

Fruit and vegetables give the child energy, vitamins, anti-oxidants, fibre, and water. These nutrients help protect the child against diseases later in life, including diseases like heart disease, stroke and some cancers.

Parents need to encourage the child to choose fruit and vegetables at every meal and for snacks. This includes fruit and vegetables of different colours, textures and tastes, both fresh and cooked.

Wash fruit to remove dirt or chemicals, and leave any edible skin on, because the skin contains nutrients too.

3. grain foods

Grain foods include bread, pasta, noodles, breakfast cereals, couscous, rice, corn, quinoa, polenta, oats and barley. These foods give your child the energy they need to grow, develop and learn.

Grain foods with a low glycaemic index, like wholegrain pasta and breads, will give your child longer-lasting energy and keep them feeling fuller for longer.

4. reduced-fat dairy or dairy-free alternatives

Key dairy foods are milk, cheese and yoghurt. These foods are good sources of calcium and protein.

In puberty, the child needs more calcium to help them reach peak bone mass and build strong bones for life. Parents need to encourage the child to have different kinds of dairy each day – for example, drinks of milk, cheese slices, bowls of yoghurt and so on.

If the child doesn't eat dairy, it's important for them to eat dairy-free foods that are rich in calcium – for example, tofu, kale, bok choy, nuts, seeds, tinned fish with bones, and calcium-fortified foods like cereal, soy milk and bread. Not all dairy alternatives are fortified with calcium, though, so make sure to read food labels.

5. protein

Protein-rich foods include lean meat, fish, chicken, eggs, beans, lentils, chickpeas, tofu and nuts. These foods are important for the child's growth and muscle development, especially during puberty.

These protein-rich foods also have other vitamins and minerals like iron and omega-3 fatty acids, which are particularly important during adolescence:

- Omega-3 fatty acids from oily fish help with the child's brain development and learning.
- Iron fuels the child's muscle growth and increase in blood volume. Girls need extra iron because of their periods.

Protein-rich foods from animal sources have zinc and vitamin B12 too.

Healthy drinks for teenagers

Water is the healthiest drink for your child. It's also the cheapest. Most tap water is fortified with fluoride for strong teeth too.

Reduced-fat milk is also a good drink option for teenagers. It's rich in calcium, which is good for bone development.