Patient information

Healthy eating for teenagers

This dietary advice sheet gives some general information to help you make the recommended changes to your diet. If you need more detailed advice, or if you are following a special diet that makes it difficult to make these changes, please ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian.



Teenagers require regular meals and snacks to give them the energy and nutrients they need to grow and fulfill their active lifestyles. Eating family meals together is often becoming quite difficult due to after school activities, clubs and going out with friends, however trying to sit down as a family where possible will encourage them to enjoy a variety of foods. Snacking all day in place of meals, usually results in eating an unbalanced diet.

Breakfast is essential every day as it gives teenagers an energy boost to cope with busy mornings at school or college. Choosing the healthy option in the school canteen or taking a packed lunch to college and then having a balanced family meal is suggested to meet the healthy eating guidelines.

What does a balanced diet mean?

1. **Fruit and vegetables:** Fruit and vegetables provide lots of vitamins and minerals which are important for fighting off illnesses. They also contain fiber which helps to maintain regular bowel movements and prevent constipation. Fruit and vegetables can be included as part of a meal, chopped up and as a snack or as fruit juice or smoothies. Teenagers should aim for at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day. Fruit and vegetables can also help to keep our skin supple and prevent spots!

   A portion is equal to:

   - 1 medium sized banana, apple, orange, peach
   - 2 small fruits e.g. plums, apricots, satsumas
   - handful of grapes, cherries, strawberries
   - 3 tablespoons of cooked vegetables or fruit
   - small salad



Putting you first

2. **Cereals, potatoes, rice and pasta:** These are all carbohydrate foods which give slow release energy. Try and choose the low sugar varieties of breakfast cereals such as Weetabix, Shredded Wheat, or Shreddies® and add dried fruit rather than sugar. Choose unrefined higher fibre types of bread and pasta such as wholemeal and granary bread, whole wheat pasta and brown rice. Teenagers should aim to have a carbohydrate source at each meal time plus sometimes as snacks between meals too if they are active.

3. **Meat, fish and alternatives:** These are all protein foods which are important for helping teenagers to grow and repair muscles. Try and include a variety of different protein containing foods such as lean meats, fish, baked beans, eggs, pulses, peas and lentils. Teenagers should aim to have protein at least twice a day.

4. **Milk and dairy foods:** These are all calcium containing foods and are important in the diet to support bone and teeth development. Teenagers should be offered either semi skimmed or skimmed milk, and should aim to have dairy foods three times a day. Soya products which are calcium enriched are suitable alternatives for those who cannot tolerate or do not wish to eat dairy products.

5. **Foods containing fat and sugar:** Fat is an important part of the diet to enable growth and development, and provide fat soluble vitamins. Ideally healthy fats should be offered such as those from vegetable sources e.g. sunflower oil, rapeseed oils and spreads, and not large quantities of fats from pastries, crisps and manufactured products. Sugar does not give us any vitamins or minerals, only calories which can lead to excess weight gain if eaten regularly. Sugar can also cause tooth decay. Try and include low sugar puddings, snacks and drinks e.g. sugar free jelly and sugar free squash.

6. **Drinks:** The ideal drinks which should be consumed throughout the day are water and sugar free drinks. Aim for 6 - 8 glasses each day. A 200ml serving of pure fruit juice would count as one portion of fruit per day. Excessive squash intake can sometimes be associated with loose bowels movements and poor eating habits.

Example of a day's menu



Breakfast: Breakfast cereal with milk, glass fruit juice or baked beans on toast

Mid-morning snack: Portion fruit/low fat pretzels

Lunch: Wholemeal bread sandwich with tuna and salad, diet yogurt, fruit

Mid-afternoon snack: Slice of malt loaf or fruit scone

Evening meal: Family meal e.g. spaghetti bolognaise or roast dinner

Bedtime snack: Diet yogurt or portion of fruit

Don't forget exercise…

Teenagers should be doing at least 60 minutes of exercise per day plus 2 hours of sport in school and 2 hours out of school. This means you should ideally join a sports club where you can also make friends, or do activities with your friends such as going on bike rides, walks or swimming. Daily activities such as walking to school/college and shops are both great ways to start getting active.

Exercise is not only really important for our health but it is also great for making us feel better – try it if you feel tired after a day at school or college. Go for a walk or bike ride, you will feel much more energised when you get back!

Useful links

www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/healthy-eating-what-adolescence-need

www.nutrition.org.uk/life-stages/teenagers/healthy-lifestyles-for-teenagers/top-healthy-eating-tips-for-teenagers

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