

A Dozen Ways to Eat Right

Healthy eating is a choice you can help your kids make every day with these simple tips. From eating a rainbow of fruits and vegetables to avoiding junk food, these 12 suggestions will have your children feeling better inside and out!



1. Start with breakfast



A healthy breakfast helps your teen's body refuel in the morning—the meal literally *breaks her fast* from the night before. Kids often skip this meal because they're short

on time or they want to save calories. But let your child know that can lead to overeating later, and brainstorm ideas for healthy foods she can prepare quickly. The best choices are those that combine protein and complex carbohydrates to keep her feeling full until lunchtime (peanut butter on a whole-wheat English muffin or string cheese and an apple). *Tip:* Suggest that she join friends for breakfast in the school cafeteria. She can find healthy choices there—and she'll get to school on time.

2. Watch portion size

Meal and snack portions have grown through the years. For an easy way to control portions, consider downsizing your dishes. For instance, serve dinner on a salad plate, or use cups rather than soup bowls. Another idea is to “plate” meals rather than putting serving bowls on the dinner table. You could also post a portion-size chart on your refrigerator as an easy reference. Look for one that compares food portions to the sizes of items your tween or teen is familiar with, such as a computer mouse or baseball (try webmd.com/diet/printable/wallet-portion-control-size-guide).

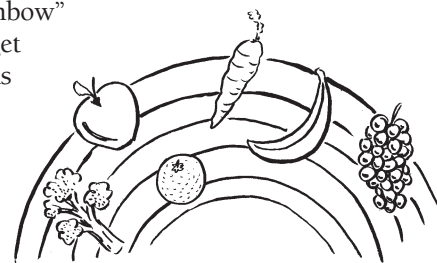
3. Cut the salt

Many kids get much more salt than the recommended 1,500 mg a day. And having too much salt puts them at

greater risk of gaining weight now and developing high blood pressure later. Encourage your child to cut down on salty snacks like chips, beef jerky, some drinks, and even pickles. Also, consider switching some brands of foods that you buy. For instance, the amount of sodium in pasta sauce can vary by as much as 100 mg or more per serving. Compare sodium levels when you're food shopping, and encourage your youngster to do the same.

4. Eat in color

The same pigments that make carrots orange and spinach dark green also contain nutrients. Let your child know that just by “eating a rainbow” each week, he will get many of the vitamins and minerals his body needs. Suggest that he pick three colors of fruits and vegetables to eat each



day. Then, he can look for those colors at the school salad bar or when he's grabbing an after-school snack. Or he might put three bowls out (on the kitchen counter, in the refrigerator) and fill each one with different shades of produce. That will make it easy for him to find a colorful, nutritious snack.

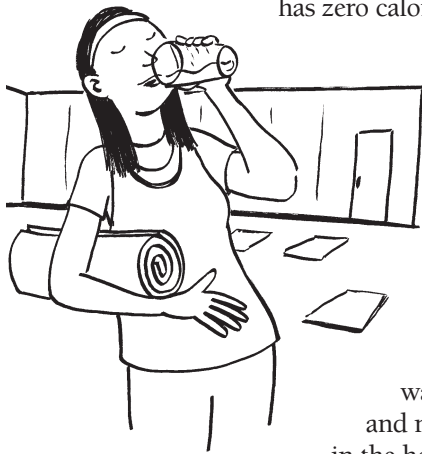
5. Switch to whole grains

The name says it all—whole grains use the entire seed and contain all the nutritional punch that goes with it. Processed grains, like white rice or breads made with white flour, contain just part of the grain seed and not nearly as

many nutrients. Along with essential vitamins and minerals, whole grains also contain fiber, which can help your tween feel full in fewer bites—and for longer. Switch to brown rice for meals and whole-grain bread for sandwiches. *Tip:* To ease the transition, you can mix the old and new (make a sandwich with one piece of whole-wheat and one piece of white bread, for instance).

6. Drink more water

Many teens drink soda every day, and that adds up to lots of extra calories and extra sugar. But even if your child only has soda occasionally, she could be gulping extra calories from sports drinks or juice. Remind her that water is the best way for her body to stay hydrated—and it has zero calories. Suggest that she fill



reusable containers with water and put them in the refrigerator. Then, she can grab one when she's heading to school, sports practices, or other activities. Make it easier for your youngster to "choose" water by serving it at meals and not having other drinks in the house.

7. Have dairy daily

A serving of cottage cheese, yogurt, milk, or cheese makes for a smart snack or meal since milk is full of bone-building nutrients like calcium and vitamin D. For the healthiest dairy choices, opt for fat-free or low-fat. Also, since flavored yogurt often has extra calories from added sugar, consider getting plain yogurt and having your teen blend in a sweetener like fresh fruit or a drizzle of honey. You can increase your child's calcium intake by including it in everyday foods (make oatmeal with milk, blend yogurt into smoothies).

8. Take your time

Did you know it can take 20 minutes to feel full after eating? If your youngster is eating too quickly, he might miss his body's cues that he's full. Encourage him to slow down while he eats and take a break between bites. Extend meals, and keep everyone from eating too fast, by encouraging pleasant conversations. You might ask your child about his day or pose questions about what's going on in the world so he has a chance to put down his fork and talk.



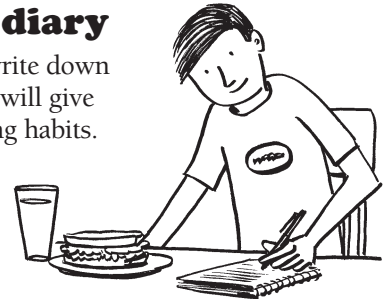
9. Choose lean protein

Your teen's body uses protein for everything from building muscles to fighting infections. By choosing lean proteins like fish, chicken, turkey, or soy, she'll avoid extra fat in meats like sausage or bacon. A hamburger or steak is okay once in a while, but for the most part she should stick with lower-fat options. *Tip:* Fish is one of the best lean proteins around. Canned tuna is a good option, as are salmon, halibut, and trout—all are high in heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids.

10. Keep a food diary

Having your youngster write down what he's eating, and when, will give him a better idea of his eating habits.

You might suggest that he record *why* he's eating, too. Is he hungry? Is he tired, bored, or stressed? Encourage him to keep track for a week and then talk about what he finds. For instance, if he usually snacks on chips or candy while watching TV, maybe he could switch to fruit or limit his screen time. As he makes changes, encourage him to continue keeping his food diary. Writing down what he eats is a great way to stay accountable to himself.



11. Avoid junk food

Your child has probably heard that junk food is made up of empty calories and fat. But she might still reach for processed foods like fruit snacks or hot dogs because they're quick and they taste good. Together, come up with a list of healthier choices (fresh fruit, turkey sandwich), and post it where your teen will see it when she's looking for food—on the refrigerator or pantry door. Also, ask her to pick a spot in your cupboard for a "snack zone." Then, work with her to fill it with nutritious options that she likes.

12. Read food labels

When you shop together or pull food items out of your pantry, take time to look at nutrition labels. Let your child know that he should be able to pronounce and recognize most ingredients listed. Too many difficult-to-pronounce ingredients usually means the food is less healthy. He should also notice which ingredients come first, since they are listed based on how much of each item is in the food. In other words, if sugar is the first ingredient listed, that food has more sugar than anything else—and he should look for something more nutritious!

Editor's Note: Teen Food & Fitness™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.

