

Healthy Changes We've Made



One step at a time, your family can become healthier! Share the stories below from tweens, teens, and parents to give your youngster inspiration for eating better and exercising more.

What the kids said...

Remember breakfast

“I was always rushing to get to school, and I often skipped breakfast. I know it’s important to eat so my body has fuel to make it through the day. My mom and I came up with ideas for healthy foods to grab on the way out the door. My favorites are whole-grain toast with mashed avocado, and a ‘breakfast dog’ — a banana covered in peanut butter and wrapped in a whole-wheat tortilla. Then, some days I eat breakfast in the cafeteria.”

Eat smaller portions

“In health class, we talked about how food portions have gotten so much bigger from when our parents were kids. In fact, my teacher said bagels are nearly twice the size they were 20 years ago. She gave us the idea to use smaller plates and bowls when we eat. The size helps me remember to eat smaller, and healthier, portions.”

Squeeze in fitness

“I read in a magazine that everyone should do 60 minutes of physical activity a day. I couldn’t figure out how to fit in an hour a day, so my friends and I brainstormed a bunch of ways to add in mini-workouts. Now we go the long way in the hall between classes, and when we hang out after school, we get a bat and ball and practice hitting and catching. I’m also using homework breaks for crunches, lunges, and other quick exercises.”



Get enough sleep

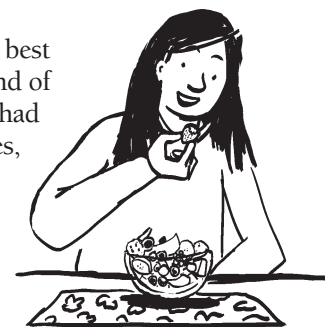
“Something my PE teacher mentioned one day really hit home. She said that when you’re over-tired, it’s harder to exercise. I’ve been trying to sleep at least eight hours every night. I learned that when I get enough sleep, I’m more in the mood to be active. Plus, a good night’s sleep also helps me do better in school, since I’m more alert.”

Avoid processed foods

“My soccer coach wanted us to bring healthy snacks, like an apple or nuts, to practice. He said that in general, the more ingredients a food has, the less healthy it is for you. I started looking at food labels, and I can’t believe how many ingredients are in potato chips! Now it’s kind of a game I play—to look for snacks that are healthy and have the shortest ingredient lists.”

Rethink dessert

“Whenever I ate dinner at my best friend’s house, they had some kind of fruit for dessert. For me, dessert had always meant ice cream, brownies, or cookies. But the fruit is so refreshing—and I don’t feel gross afterward. Now when I want something sweet after dinner, I reach for fruit instead.”



Picture success

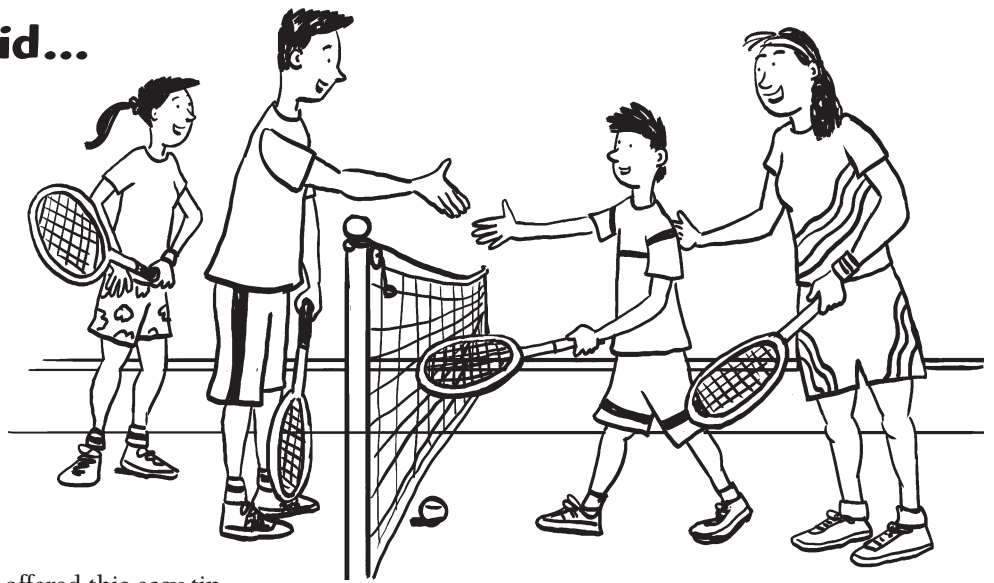
“This spring, I began trying to be more active, and I felt great. To stay motivated, I posted a picture of myself by the bathroom mirror. The photo shows me biking with friends and having fun—it reminds me to keep working out.”

continued

What the parents said...

Lose together

"My teen wanted to lose weight, but he said he had no clue where to start. I told him I had been thinking about losing a few pounds myself, and maybe we could motivate each other. We decided to make one change each month, like cutting out soda or taking up tennis. It has been three months, and we're steadily working toward a healthy weight together. It's fun to cheer each other on—and succeed."



Enjoy every bite

"My neighbor is a nutritionist, and she offered this easy tip to eat more slowly: Put your fork down between bites. That way, she said, you give yourself time to chew your food and appreciate the flavors. I've been encouraging my tween to do this, and we've noticed that when we take our time, we are more aware of when we've had enough to eat."

Set a kitchen curfew



"It seemed like our family was always snacking right up until bedtime. I thought that if we 'closed' the kitchen at a certain time, we could avoid eating into the night. We agreed on 8:30 p.m. as our kitchen curfew. Once that time hits, we don't go into the kitchen until the morning. You wouldn't believe how much better we feel!"

Make an exercise plan

"My cousin posted this idea on Facebook. He put together a monthly workout plan with a fitness activity for each day, such as doing a core-strengthening video or walking the dog. I liked his idea, so I made a copy to show my family. Then, we came up with our own ideas and put together our own workout plan. I'm proud that we are now able to get in exercise every day."

Blend in vegetables

"I wanted my kids to eat more vegetables, but they weren't fans. Then, I saw an idea in a magazine for a spinach smoothie. It made a great after-school snack, and my kids didn't even

notice the spinach because it's blended with plain Greek yogurt, frozen raspberries, and pineapple chunks. Next I'm going to try carrot smoothies."

Think lean

"When I buy meat, I look for the leanest cuts by checking the percentage of fat. I also get skinless chicken, or I take off the skin before cooking it. And I try to serve fish twice a week. Another idea that has worked well is Meatless Monday—every Monday we have something like omelets or brown-rice-and-vegetable bowls to change things up a bit."

Choose healthier salads

"I've always encouraged my family to order salads when we eat out, so I was surprised when a friend said restaurant salads aren't always the best choice. She said they often have ingredients that add lots of calories, like creamy dressings, cheese, croutons, and bacon bits. Now when we order salads, we skip the extras and ask for a lighter dressing on the side."



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