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Nutrition for teenagers



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Nutrition is particularly important during your teenage years when your body goes through rapid growth and also mental and emotional changes. A major growth spurt generally occurs at around 12 years for females and 14 years for males. This may lead to an increase in your appetite.

At this time, your body's need for nutrients i.e. protein, carbohydrates (starches), fats, as well as vitamins and minerals, is increased. Because you may have an increased appetite and be eating more, it's important to choose foods wisely. The key to nutrition is choosing a variety of foods that will provide a variety of nutrients to nourish your body, so you can be the best version of yourself!



BALANCE YOUR INTAKE OF FOODS DURING THE DAY

Breakfast is important and helps maintain concentration levels during the morning. Good choices include:

- wholewheat toast with peanut butter / sliced cheese or cream cheese / poached egg
- A smoothie with plain yoghurt + frozen berries or peanut butter & banana

Aim to eat regular small meals and snacks during the day when you have breaks. If you're eating foods from home, pack a cooler bag for this. If you have choices to make in a canteen, try and choose foods with healthy ingredients.

Don't skip meals because this can lower your energy levels, and this will affect your ability to concentrate and perform in sport or other school activities.

KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU

During the teenage years our body's 'lay the foundation' for our bones, and peak bone mass or strength is achieved around the age of 20 years. A poor diet during your teenage years can affect your body's ability to lay down this 'foundation' or peak bone mass, and can negatively affect bone strength when you're an adult.

The nutrients that are important for bone growth and maintenance are:

- Calcium from: dairy products | almonds | salmon or sardines with the bones | dark green vegetables broccoli, spinach, kale
- Magnesium from: nuts and seeds | avocados | dark green leafy vegetables | potatoes | wholegrain foods like oats, quinoa, corn, barley, brown rice
- Phosphorous from: meat | poultry | nuts | beans | dairy products
- Vitamin D from: eggs | dairy products | tuna, salmon | mushrooms
- Vitamin A from: butternut, carrots, spinach | sweet potato | red peppers | cantaloupe melon | beef or chicken liver/liver pate
- Vitamin K from: meat | broccoli, kale, salad greens, cabbage | cheese
- Protein from: meat | poultry | fresh and tinned fish | dairy products | nuts | beans & lentils



Protein is not only important for bones, but is also required for muscle growth and maintenance. Choose lean protein sources such as grilled steak, chicken or fish. When protein is battered and fried, it adds additional energy in the form of carbohydrate and fat. Avoid eating fried foods every day.

It is important that your diet has sufficient nutrients to help your immune system function for the prevention of illness, to help your body cope in times of mental fatigue such as exams, or physical fatigue such as long sporting events.

Nutrients that can help your immune system function include:

- Selenium from: dairy | nuts | sunflower seeds | mushrooms | poultry & meat | seafood
- Zinc from: beef, pork & poultry | beans, lentils | nuts | whole grain foods e.g. oats, rye, barley, quinoa, brown rice
- Vitamin C from: oranges, grapefruit, easy peelers | strawberries | pineapple | kiwi fruit | peppers | tomatoes | cabbage | broccoli
- B-Vitamins from: a range of foods including wholewheat bread, whole grain foods | eggs | meat & poultry | milk | beans, lentils and peas | nuts
- Iron from: meat, pork | dark green leafy vegetables | dried fruit | eggs | pumpkin seeds

Iron not only supports the immune system, but is also an important nutrient for females because it is lost during menstruation and needs to be replaced in the diet.



A WORD ON ALL THE OTHER FOODS OUT THERE!

When it comes to fast foods and snacks, there are so many choices! Whilst they're convenient, the down side of many fast foods is that they're high in fat, salt, sugar and refined carbohydrates (starches) and too much of these types of foods may lead to weight gain. It may also mean that recommended nutrient requirements are not met, and this may lead to nutrient deficiencies which can affect your health in the long term.

It's ok to enjoy some fast foods occasionally e.g. on the weekends if you're out with friends. Try to make healthier choices during the week, for example choosing a wholewheat sandwich or a wrap that contains protein and salad, rather than a pie and chips.

Some foods such as crisps, doughnuts, biscuits, pastries, sugary drinks and sweets are very high in energy, and don't provide many beneficial nutrients,.

Whilst all these types of food may be tasty treats, they don't nourish your body or provide health benefits, and may even make you feel lethargic. It's best not to keep these types of foods at home - rather enjoy them on special occasions like parties and events or a treat on the weekend.

If you're needing a snack for your afternoon sporting event, or to sustain you while studying, it's good to note that some 'energy' or snack bars can be very high in sugar. Read labels to compare what these provide. Great snack choices are: a handful of mixed nuts / cut fruit with plain yoghurt / 'trail' mix (a mix of nuts, seeds and dried fruit).



HYDRATE!

Water is your best hydration choice. It helps to prevent tiredness and fatigue when you drink at least 2 litres of water during day. This can be enjoyed in the form of plain water, tea, the occasional coffee or sugar-free flavoured water. You can add some taste and flavour to plain water by adding lemon, cucumber or apple slices, or mint leaves.

Sports drinks are very high in sugar and sodium, and should only be consumed if you're participating in a sporting event longer than an hour. If you're playing sport the whole afternoon, or involved in competition, then sports drinks can provide a benefit of preventing fatigue and excessive sodium loss from sweat. If you're highly competitive, you may need more fluid during sporting activities.

Energy drinks are not considered a good choice because of their high caffeine content and mix of ingredients that can affect your sleep patterns and mood. Whilst they may provide energy, they can also make your energy levels 'dip' following a release of insulin by your body, to cope with the high sugar content in many of these drinks. They should be avoided when playing sport because they may raise the heart rate and may have a serious effect on health.

BE ACTIVE!

Keeping active is a great way to be social, help reduce exam stress, keep your heart and muscles strong, and maintain a healthy body weight. If you're not involved in school sports, try and keep active by walking, cycling or swimming.

If you treat your body well when you're young, you'll be set for success in the future!

For more information about how healthy eating can benefit your lifestyle or the lifestyle of your close ones, feel free to take on of our other leaflets!
You can inspire small and positive changes everyday!

SPAR recognises that all consumers' have different dietary needs.
Please consult a health professional if you have any specific health concerns or need specific dietary guidance.



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