

Nutrition and Teens: A Guide for Parents

Family members can play an important role in helping teens to become healthier. It is much easier to cook, shop, and prepare delicious and nutritious meals and snacks when everyone is working on the same goals. Here are nutrition and wellness tips you can work on as a family:

1. Be a good role model.

It is important for family members to follow a healthy lifestyle. Teens are influenced by what they see. If the entire family is active and eating well, teens are likely to follow!

2. Keep healthy foods in the house.

Stock the kitchen cabinets, refrigerator, and freezer with nutritious foods, like fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products (yogurt, cheese, and milk), and whole grains (whole oats, brown rice, whole wheat cereal, or whole grain bread). Place healthy snacks in the front section of your refrigerator. If nutritious foods are available, your family is likely to make healthier choices. For example, if you have fresh fruit in a bowl on the kitchen table, your teen is more likely to choose it over a less nutritious snack food.

3. Grocery shop together.

Plan a trip to the grocery store with your teen. Start by making a list of the things you will need to buy. This will help keep you on track when you are at the store. Be sure to include items for breakfasts, lunches, dinners, snacks, and treats. Choose foods from all the food groups (grains, fruits, vegetables, proteins, and dairy). This way, the family will have all the ingredients for healthful eating.



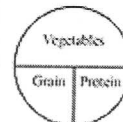
4. Cook and eat meals together.

Learning how to cook is an important life lesson. Involve your teen with preparing healthy meals. Instead of frying, try: baking, grilling, steaming, or using the microwave to prepare foods. Although eating together can be a challenge because everyone has busy schedules, try to make it a priority. Talking and connecting with your teen is an important part of family time and it will also help slow down the pace of the meal to prevent overeating.



5. Eat healthy portion sizes.

People often eat all the food on their plate regardless of hunger. Provide a range of foods (including protein, grains, and vegetables) and start your teen with smaller portions initially. Try serving a well-balanced plate that is about 1/2 vegetables, 1/4 protein, and 1/4 grain such as pasta, rice, potatoes, or bread. If your teen is still hungry, then he or she can have an additional serving of the nutritious foods provided.



6. Eat at home most of the time.

Eating less fast food is an important step for the health of your family and your teen. Fast food is higher in fat, salt, and calories than most meals prepared at home. Also, portion sizes at fast food and other restaurants are too large and can lead to weight gain.

7. Watch for hidden calories in drinks.

Drinks like juice or regular soda are high in calories but are not very nutritious or filling. Buy sugar-free beverages such as Fruit2O, Crystal Light, seltzer, and diet soda. Drinking high-fat milk also adds excess calories; choose low-fat milk like skim or 1%.

8. Have treats in moderation.

Extreme dieting or fasting can be dangerous and is not successful for long term weight control.

Healthy eating involves balancing nutritious foods with occasional treats. Having treats in the house can be very tempting for some people, so talk to your teen about what feels comfortable to him or her. It may be better for your family to go out for treats or buy them in single serving packages.



9. Make small behavior changes.

Permanent changes in health happen with small steps, not with strict dieting. Focus on making concrete small changes, such as drinking less regular soda and juice, eating more fruits and vegetables, or eating less fast food. Making small changes as a family can produce great health benefits.



10. Pick a food goal for the week or month.

Help your teen select a health-related food goal for the week or month. Examples include: packing a portable backpack snack instead of buying a candy bar at the convenience store after school, or bringing a healthy lunch to school instead of buying the cafeteria pizza and soda.