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teenage food healthy teenage eating





## Teenage Food

Being the proud father of a large family, I know first hand that dealing with teenagers can be a challenge for even the most flexible of parents, and working out what foods will be acceptable to their emerging palates can be one of the greatest of these challenges.

However, I firmly believe that as parents, we can have the biggest impact on what our children eat. If we shop, cook and eat together with our kids, we can help establish eating patterns that promise to maximise the future health of our teenagers.

Accredited Practising Dietitian Glenn Cardwell, has done a superb job in putting together Teenage Food. Inside this guide you'll find plenty of advice to help reassure some, inspire others and help us all cope with the demands of modern family life.

Teenage Food is one of a suite of healthy eating guides available from HBF as part of its Community Health Advocacy Program. For more information on HBF's Community Health Program or for general health information, visit the HBF Family Doctor pages at [www.hbf.com.au](http://www.hbf.com.au)

Stay healthy!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Duncan Jefferson". The signature is stylized with a large, looping 'D' and a cursive 'Jefferson'.

HBF Family Doctor  
**Duncan Jefferson**

## Teenage nutrition — a guide for parents

Nutrition in the life of a teenager has a different meaning to those of children or adults. Their food choices are more likely to be based on convenience, peer pressure, self image, trends and access to money. In many ways their food choices are making a statement of independence. Parents will have less control, while the teenager will be taking more control over what they eat. This change and need for independence has to be respected, although there are many opportunities for parents to encourage good eating habits.

### The most important thing

Parents want their teenagers to eat well and be healthy. That's what we want too. First, you need to know that you are the biggest and most important influence to get your teenager eating well. If you are a good role model, your teenager is much more likely to eat well. Not every mealtime, admittedly, but over a week or more they will eat pretty well. Don't expect to influence your children's eating habits if you tell them to eat their vegetables while you hardly eat them yourself. Don't expect them to eat fruit if they never see you eating fruit. If sweet biscuits, crisps and soft drinks are always in the house, you are saying they are always fine to eat and drink. Teenagers will learn more from your actions than they will from any lectures on nutrition.





## Dietary guidelines

Based on the scientific information on the nutritional requirements for children and teenagers, following are the guidelines for Australian children and adolescents. They are not in order of importance. They are designed to provide a balance of good nutrition. The guidelines should not be used to judge single foods because they apply to the total diet. All, except the first one, are important for teenage nutrition.

1. **Encourage and support breastfeeding.**
2. **Children and adolescents need sufficient nutritious foods to grow and develop normally.**
3. **Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods.**
4. **Eat plenty of vegetables, legumes and fruit.**
5. **Eat plenty of cereals (including breads, rice, pasta and noodles), preferably wholegrain.**
6. **Include lean meat, fish, poultry and/or alternatives.**
7. **Include milks, yoghurts, cheeses and/or alternatives.**
8. **Choose water as a drink.**
9. **Limit saturated fat and moderate total fat intake.**
10. **Choose foods low in salt.**
11. **Consume only moderate amounts of sugars and foods containing added sugars.**
12. **Care for your child's food; prepare and store it safely.**

A copy of the Australian Government's official Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents can be downloaded from [nhmrc.gov.au/publications](http://nhmrc.gov.au/publications)

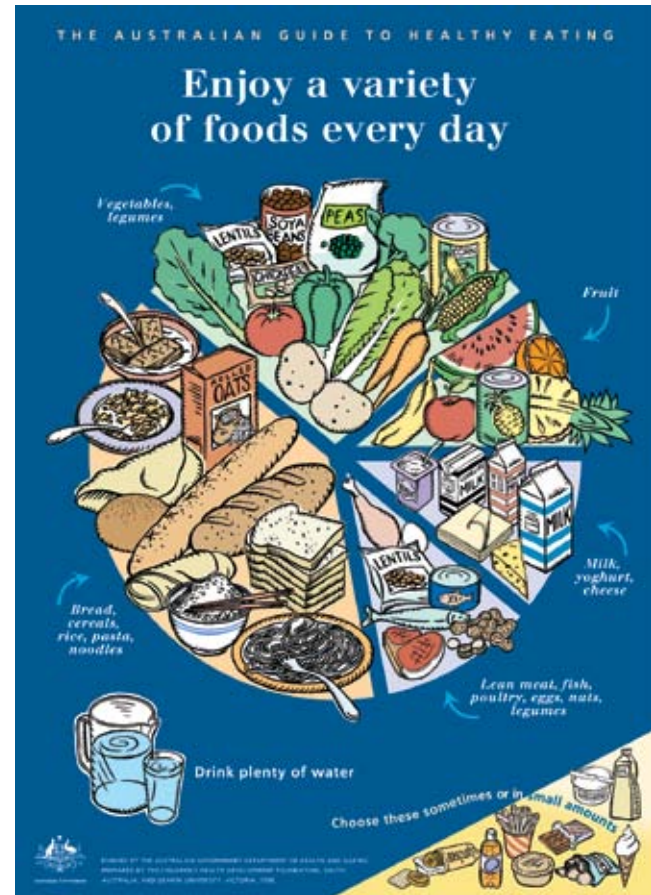
## Food and health

Let's take a look at what is good eating for the teenager.

The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating is in the form of a 'food plate' to show the balance of nutrition needed for health.

This is shown in the illustration to the right.

The amount of food a child or teenager needs to get the essential nutrients for growth and development are found on the following page. Some very active teenagers will need more than this to get enough energy (kilojoules) each day. Adolescents need extra nutrients to support their growth spurt, which begins in girls at around 9–11 years, peaks at age 11–12, and is generally completed around 15 years. Girls tend to only grow taller after their first menstrual period. For boys, it begins at around 10–12 years, peaks at 12–14 years and ends by about age 19. Some boys can continue growing into their early twenties, particularly if they are late developers.



Reprinted, with permission, from the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating





SUGGESTED SERVES FROM EACH FOOD GROUP						
Age	BREAD, CEREALS ETC	VEGETABLES, LEGUMES	FRUIT	MILK, YOGHURT ETC	MEAT, FISH, EGGS ETC	EXTRA FOODS
Children 4-7 yrs	3-4	4	2	3	0.5-1	1-2
Children 8-11 yrs	4-6	4-5	1-2	3	1-1.5	1-2
Adolescents 12-18 yrs	4-7	5-9	3-4	3-5	1-2	1-3

Source: Australian Guide to Healthy Eating. Commonwealth of Australia 1998

## What is a serve size?

On the previous page is the minimum number of serves from each food group needed for good health. The serve sizes for children and teenagers are given for comparison because you may have a child in a different age bracket.

As there is often confusion over what is a serve size, here are some examples of one serve:

### **Bread and cereal group**

(best choices are wholemeal and wholegrain)

- 2 slices of bread or 1 bread roll
- 1 cup cooked rice, pasta or noodles
- 1 cup cooked porridge
- 1 ⅓ cups breakfast cereal (40g)
- 2 wheat breakfast biscuits

### **Vegetable group**

(serve a variety of colours)

- ½ cup cooked vegetables
- ½ cup cooked legumes, eg. baked beans
- 1 cup salad
- 1 small potato

### **Fruit**

(fresh fruit has the most fibre)

- 1 medium fruit, eg. banana, orange
- 2 small fruit, eg. apricots, plums
- 1 cup canned fruit
- 125ml fruit juice
- 1½ tbsps sultanas

### **Milk and milk alternatives**

(try the reduced fat varieties)

- 1 cup milk
- 1 cup soy drink (calcium fortified)
- ½ cup evaporated milk
- 40g cheese (2 slices)
- 200g yoghurt (1 small tub)
- 1 cup custard

### **Meat and meat alternatives**

(trim off any excess fat)

- 65-100g cooked meat, chicken
- 80-120g cooked fish
- 2 small eggs
- ½ cup cooked legumes, eg. baked beans
- ⅓ cup nuts
- 1½ tbsps peanut butter

### **Extra foods**

(enjoyable, but not essential)

- 1½ scoops of ice cream
- 4 plain sweet biscuits
- 40g cake
- 25g chocolate
- 30g potato crisps
- 12 hot chips
- 50g jelly beans, jelly snakes



## A day's teenage eating

So, to put this together as a day's eating, a teenager might eat:

### **Breakfast**

80g breakfast cereal (2 bread serves)

240ml milk (1 milk serve)

125ml fruit juice (1 fruit serve)

### **Morning snack**

1 banana (1 fruit serve)

1 glass water

### **Lunch**

1 sandwich comprising 2 slices bread (2 bread serves), 40g cheese (1 milk serve), tomato, lettuce, cucumber (about ½ vegetable serve)

1 apple (1 fruit serve)

1 glass water

### **Afternoon snack**

25g chocolate (1 extra serve)

300ml carton flavoured milk (1 milk serve)

### **Evening meal**

150g beef (1½ meat serve)

2 potatoes (2 vegetable serves)

1½ cups vegetables (3 vegetable serves)

1 slice bread and margarine (1 bread serve)

1 cup canned fruit (1 fruit serve)

1½ scoops of ice cream (1 extra serve)

The eating plan above totals 5 bread serves, 5½ vegetable serves, 4 fruit serves, 3 milk serves, 1½ meat serves, and 2 extra serves.

We are certain they will often eat a lot more than this during the peak growing years, but it does give an idea of the amount needed for good health. Large appetites are normal for teenagers going through their growth spurts. If their shoe size is increasing then you can expect a bigger appetite!

## The important minerals

Adequate iron and calcium are particularly important as the adolescent undergoes the growth spurt. By eating a balanced diet, your teenager should be getting enough of both these important minerals. Many food companies have also produced both iron and calcium fortified foods to help teenagers get their daily needs, for example breakfast cereals, milk and bread.



## Iron

Iron is an important mineral during growth, especially for young women. Iron needs of children are 8 mg per day, while for adolescents it rises to 11 mg for boys and 15 mg for girls. Not getting enough iron will contribute to fatigue, pale skin and anaemia, and reduce their ability to concentrate and fight infections. You can see from the list opposite that many foods provide iron.

Meats and seafood provide easy-to-absorb iron, while iron from plant foods (for example bread and rice) is less easy to absorb. Foods high in vitamin C greatly improve the absorption of iron from plant foods, hence you will often hear the advice to eat fruit with vegetarian meals, slice a banana on breakfast cereal or have a glass of juice with meals.



Meats, seafood, egg	Iron (mg)	Breakfast cereals	Vegetables, fruits		
Liver, grilled 100g	11.0	Weetbix Multigrain, 2 biscuits	3.0	Dried apricots, 5 pieces	1.3
Lean beef, average 100g	3.5	Sportsplus, FibrePlus 45g	3.0	Peas, ½ cup	1.0
Lean lamb, average 100g	3.0	Cornflakes, 30g	3.0	Potato, 1 medium	0.8
Paté, 1 tbsp	2.0	Just Right, Sustain 30g	3.0	Sultanas, 2 tbsp	0.6
Lean pork, average 100g	1.0	Weetbix, 2 biscuits	2.5	Vegetables, average serve	0.5
Chicken leg, no skin, 100g	1.0	Breakfast bars, 1 average	2.5	Fresh fruit, 1 serve	0.5
Tuna, salmon, 100g	1.0	Sultana Bran, 30g	2.0	Confectionery, muesli bars	
Shellfish, average serve	1.0	Muesli, natural ½ cup	1.5	Dark chocolate 25g	1.0
Egg, 1 whole medium egg	0.8	Vitabrits, 2 biscuits	1.0	Muesli bars, 1 average	0.7
Fish, grilled, average 100g	0.6	Porridge, ¾ cup	1.0	Milk chocolate 25g	0.4
Chicken breast, no skin, 100g	0.5	Wheatgerm, 1 tbsp	0.6		
Legumes, nuts		Breads, rice & pasta			
Baked beans, lentils,		Wholemeal bread, 1 slice	0.6		
Kidney beans ½ cup	2.0	Fruit loaf, 1 slice	0.6		
Cashews 30g	1.5	White bread, 1 slice	0.4		
Almonds 30g	1.2	Pasta, ½ cup	0.4		
Peanuts 30g	0.6	Rice, ½ cup	0.2		
Peanut butter, 1 tbsp	0.4				

## Calcium

Teenagers need a lot of calcium for their bones and teeth. Stronger bones built during adolescence can help reduce the risk of fractures today and brittle bones (osteoporosis) in later years. Calcium needs of children are 1000mg a day, while this need rises in teenagers to 1300mg daily.

Dairy foods such as milk, cheese, yoghurt and ice cream are the most common source of calcium. Calcium is also found in calcium-fortified soy drinks, tinned fish with edible bones and green, leafy vegetables. The list opposite shows you the best sources of calcium.

### Milk per 250ml

Calcium Plus	600
Skim/Tone milk	350
Light Start	350
Hilo milk	310
Flavoured milks	250
Whole milk	275

### Yoghurt per 200g

Low fat, natural	450
Low fat, fruit flavour	330
Plain, natural	360
Whole, fruit flavour	260

### Cheese per 30g

Cheddar	220
Processed	170
Ricotta	80
Cottage cheese	30

### Calcium (mg)

### Soy foods

Calcium-fortified soy drink, 250ml	320
Tofu, firm 100g	300
Tofu, soft 100g	30
Soy beans ½ cup	65

### Desserts per serve

Custard, ½ cup	160
Icecream, 1½ scoops	100

### Other foods per serve

Sardines + bones, 50g	270
Salmon + bones, 50g	170
Prawns 100g	80
Milk chocolate, 25g	60
Tahini (sesame seed paste), 1 tbsp	65
Baked beans, 1 cup	90
Almonds, 30g	70
Kidney beans, chick peas ½ cup	40
Brazil nuts 30g	50

Sesame seeds, 3 tbsp 30g	20
Egg	35
Broccoli, 1 cup cooked	35
Dark chocolate, 25g	15
Bread, 1 slice	25
Meat, chicken, 100g	20
Peanuts 30g	20
Peanut butter, 1 tbsp	10
Pasta, 1 cup cooked	10
Rice, 1 cup cooked	5



## The usual eating habits of a teenager

Teenagers generally choose food for taste and gratification. It is mainly adults (and older teenagers) who realise that eating habits can make a big difference to long-term health. The best you can do is offer good, wholesome food at home and be a good role model for them.

Teenagers will usually eat three meals a day, because skipping meals will leave them hungry and tired. However, those three meals probably won't provide enough nutrition for normal growth, hence they will eat 2–4 snacks a day in addition to the meals, especially if they are involved in sport. Now you know why you run out of food so rapidly!

Sometimes teenagers do skip a meal because they have run out of time or have social commitments. They will be happy if you make them a quick sandwich or give them a banana, a muesli or nut bar as they race out of the house.

Teenagers may seem to ignore your good advice on nutrition, but don't judge your teenager's eating habits as either 'good' or 'bad' as they can take it personally. The main message is that it is the amount and the frequency of consumption that really determines whether a food or meal is good or bad. Having fish and chips once a month is not likely to harm anyone's health. Eating fatty takeaways four times a week, on the other hand, could contribute to overweight and unhealthy blood cholesterol. Of course, there are some healthy takeaways to choose from.

## Choosing a good takeaway

Takeaway foods can make life much easier when you are on holidays, stretched for time, or haven't been able to do the grocery shopping. Sure, some takeaways are high in fat and salt, but there are a good many with wholesome offerings.

Go to the website of a franchised takeaway and there is a good chance that they provide the nutritional breakdown of every food and drink they sell. From there you can choose the ones with the lowest fat and salt content. As a rough guide, a low fat meal is one that provides 15g or less of fat for the entire meal. Good examples are meals made on bread rolls or salads. Some pie and hamburger outlets now provide low fat choices. Food halls can offer a variety of healthy choices, such as stir-fries, salads, noodles and sushi.

When choosing takeaways, use it as an opportunity to educate your teenagers as to why you have made a healthy choice.

## Snacks

When teenagers want to eat, they want to eat now. Snacks are a very important source of nutrients and kilojoules to fuel the growth, development and exercise in teenagers.

The trick for parents is to make healthy snacks easy snacks.

Last night's leftovers can be heated up with some baked beans for a quick mini-meal. Have some fresh fruit salad in the fridge, so it can be served up with some yoghurt in a flash, or have a bowl of dried fruit and nuts on the bench. Muffins with grilled tomato and cheese can be made in an instant. Even a quick snack of sardines on toast or breakfast cereal and milk is ideal to help meet the teenager's nutrition needs.

There are some other great tasting snacks that provide good nutrition.

- **Fruit (fresh and canned) • Sandwiches • Toast and peanut butter**
- **Cheese on toast • Cheese and cracker biscuits**
- **Home-made popcorn • Pita bread and dip • Flavoured milk**
- **Flavoured yoghurt • Cereal and milk • Chocolate • Nut bars**
- **Muesli bars • Food bars**



## Vegetarianism

Some teenagers will decide to become vegetarian. This may be due to friends becoming vegetarian or because of religious, cultural, animal welfare or health beliefs. A wisely chosen vegetarian diet can be very healthy and can provide all the nutrients for growth and development. The protein needs of vegetarian children can be met by milk, cheese, yoghurt, eggs, nuts, peanut butter, soy drinks and legumes (eg. baked beans, lentils and kidney beans). It is always good to have a variety of these foods as they offer a range of nutrients. Dairy foods and calcium-fortified soy foods provide calcium, while legumes, nuts and eggs will provide other minerals like iron.

Problems can arise on very strict vegetarian diets such as a vegan diet where no animal-derived foods at all are eaten. This can lead to delayed growth and possible deficiencies in vitamin B12, calcium, zinc, iron and protein. We recommend that you seek the advice of an Accredited Practising Dietitian in this situation.

## Eating for brain power

High school is the time teenagers will experience tests, homework, projects and final year exams. Teenagers need to eat well to keep their brain in peak condition as poor eating habits can make the brain work less efficiently.

Habits that can reduce brain efficiency and concentration include:

- **Missing meals, especially breakfast. It is now well established that being hungry makes it more difficult to memorise class work and think through problems. Make sure breakfast is eaten, even if it is only a drink of milk, fruit or some yoghurt.**
- **Eating poorly. Balanced nutrition will mean better sleeping habits, less colds and flus.**
- **Being dehydrated will affect thinking. Make sure plenty of fluids are consumed after sport and exercise.**
- **Energy drinks containing caffeine should not be consumed late at night as they can cause sleeplessness.**
- **Alcohol. Older teenagers may consume alcohol. Encourage sensible drinking habits. Excess alcohol will not help anyone's study performance.**



## Food and your skin

Pimples are the bugbear of the teenage years and appear mainly due to normal hormonal changes during puberty. At the moment no-one is sure how the diet can influence pimples. Many parents think that one way to control eating habits among their children and teenagers is to tell them that confectionery or chips will give them pimples. There is general agreement among dermatologists that specific foods, like chocolate, probably don't directly cause acne. However, more recent studies suggest that good old healthy eating can reduce the severity of acne. If you have concerns about your teenager's skin then see your GP for advice. There are medications available to reduce the severity of acne.



## Controlling weight

We live in an environment that makes it less likely that teenagers walk or ride their bikes. It is probably the lack of activity that makes it easy for teenagers to gain excess weight. This is why being involved in daily play, sport or exercise can be so important for teenagers to stay a healthy weight.

Body weight is a balance of kilojoules in and kilojoules out. Exercise is the kilojoules out; food and drink are the kilojoules in. Despite all that you have heard, the best way to control body weight is to be active each day and to eat a good wholesome diet as described earlier.

## Weight loss diets

It is quite normal for teenagers to grow in both height and weight. If your teenager gets a little tubby, weight loss is not recommended because it can interfere with their growth and development.

In this case the aim is to keep their weight stable and allow them to 'grow into' their weight.

Never place a teenager on a fad diet (eg. low carbohydrate diets) or a crash diet (eg. only apples all day) as they are unsuccessful

in the long run and do not educate the teenager about healthy eating. If you would like your teenager to receive specific dietary advice then take them to an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

Strict dieting can result in constipation, a lack of energy for sport and not enough essential nutrients like calcium and iron. It can also stop growth and development and prevent girls from having their periods. All this can lead to brittle bones and fatigue.

For weight control, the best dietary advice is to provide nutritious meals at home and reduce the number of 'extra' foods and sugary drinks. Teenagers like to rebel and choosing high kilojoule snack foods can be part of that. Peer pressure and the desire to look good will hopefully get them to change to positive eating habits.

Parents should also realise that some teenagers, usually girls, can feel they are overweight when they are actually a good weight for their height. Even some underweight teenagers attempt to lose further weight. This is not always easy to discourage, as they may have an eating disorder.

## Eating disorders

We have all seen pictures of models and actors with eating disorders. It is easy to recognise when it has gone too far. As parents, you want to stop the situation ever getting to this stage. The two main types of eating disorders are **anorexia nervosa** and **bulimia nervosa**, often shortened to anorexia and bulimia. Both boys and girls can develop anorexia and bulimia, but the conditions are more common among teenage girls. Teenagers with anorexia do not see themselves as underweight and have an intense fear of gaining weight. In females, periods will cease when body weight drops below a critical level. In younger girls, the onset of menstruation is delayed. Sufferers of eating disorders may often acquire a very detailed knowledge of nutrition, especially an awareness of the kilojoule content of foods. Due to very low levels of body fat, extra clothing is worn to keep the body warm. Some become very good cooks, but often eat very little of what they cook, while others become vegetarian, only as an excuse to gradually eat less food. To deliberately lose weight, young people with anorexia may exercise for more than two hours a day.

Bulimia has different characteristics although there is still an obsession with food and eating. Secret binge eating, consuming food for its emotional comfort, rather than nutrition, is common. Laxatives may be used to hasten weight loss. This is very dangerous as it can cause dehydration and interfere with the heart rhythm. They often feel out of control when they eat and tend to purge their body of food eaten by vomiting, abusing laxatives or exercising at length to 'burn off' the kilojoules eaten. They will usually look to be normal weight unless they also suffer from anorexia. Sometimes their dentist will comment that the enamel on their front teeth is eroding and their teeth may tingle when eating hot or cold food (this is due to stomach acid eroding tooth enamel during frequent vomiting). Eating disorders are an illness and require specialist medical attention. Speak to your GP for more information. There are support groups that can help teenagers and parents deal with the illness.

**Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders Inc**  
[anred.com](http://anred.com)

**WA Eating Disorders Alliance**  
[thebutterflyfoundation.org.au](http://thebutterflyfoundation.org.au)



## Don't despair

Despite your wise words and providing nutritious meals and keeping the fruit bowl filled, your teenager may seem to disregard all that you do to promote healthy eating habits. Don't despair if they have unconventional eating styles. The good food habits you have portrayed over a lifetime will rub off. Once into early adulthood, it is common for them to realise that they have to take responsibility for their health and then begin to incorporate a lot of the healthy habits you demonstrated during their growing years. That makes it all worthwhile.

## 10 food tips for parents

- **Keep the fruit bowl 'topped up' or have fruit salad in the fridge.** Teenagers are more likely to eat fruit when it is readily available.
- **Make sure teenagers start the day with breakfast.** This will help their thinking and memory at school.
- **Water is the ideal thirst quencher.** Keep water bottles handy.
- **Boost your teenager's interest in good nutrition.** Encourage them to cook.
- **For good health, vitality and improved immunity.** Serve fruit, salad and vegetables each day.
- **Buy treat foods occasionally, not daily.** This sends the strong message that some foods are occasional foods, while other foods, like fruit, are everyday foods.
- **Keep foods like bread, peanut butter, cheese, yoghurt and tinned fruit handy.** These are excellent for a quick snack.
- **Don't encourage fad or crash diets.** They are unhealthy and potentially dangerous.
- **Teenagers who grow up in families that regularly eat together have better nutrition.** Aim to have a meal as a family at least once a day.
- **Above all, be a good role model.** When parents eat lots of fruit and vegetables, their children tend to follow suit.

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