

Nutrition for Your Growing Teen

Does your teen experience any of these conditions?

Moodiness, forgetfulness, fatigue, sugar craves, binge eating, acne, period discomfort, hair loss, gastritis, hyperactivity or stress? They are what you feed them!

The best food for babies is breast milk, while older children and teenagers need a balance of different types of food and exercise to ensure healthy growth and weight.

Until they reach the age of 18, their muscles will grow bigger, bones longer and stronger, so their bodies need to power this growth.

Eating a variety of foods every day is important to ensure that they get a balanced diet. If they refuse to eat a whole group of food, there is a need to correct the imbalance with other foods, or by supplementation.

Rapid growth occurs between 11 - 15 years of age and these spurts have great nutritional demands that might lead to deficiencies if a well balanced diet is compromised or certain major food groups are missing from your teenager's nutritional intake.

Too often, regular meals are replaced by snacks high in fat, sugar and salt, fast foods and sugary drinks due to hunger or convenience. Being in their prime of youth, some teenagers do not take health issues seriously and consume a whopping amount of these unhealthy foods, leading to obesity and under nutrition. Many of these teenagers do not have healthy eating habits as healthy food may taste bland and do not look appetising!

This is a complimentary feature article contributed by Ms Viviana Wou, who is a Certified Nutritionist of the Singapore Nutrition & Dietetics Association, Food Development Technologist registered with the Singapore Institute of Food Science & Technology, and Nutritional Consultant to several major food and healthcare industries in the United Kingdom. In Singapore, she practises as a Nutritionist of the Food Advisory group, specialising in providing nutritional programmes to improve the dietary intake of individuals with health concerns.

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On average per day, teenagers should have 5 - 8 portions of bread / rice / noodles / cereal / potatoes, 4 serving of vegetables, 3 types of fruits, 3 types of calcium fortified milk / soy / cheese / yogurt and 1 - 2 portion(s) of meat / fish / beans.

Vitamin B group is required for energy, blood formation and nervous system. Deficiency causes fatigue, loss of appetite, irritability, mental confusion, poor memory, poor growth and hair loss. Foods rich in **Vitamin B** are nuts, brown rice, fatty fish, green leafy vegetables and citrus fruits.

Iron is important for oxygen transportation in the blood stream and builds resistance to infection when combined with **Vitamin C** which enhances absorption. Especially important for girls who have started menstruation for prevention of anaemia. It's found most in liver, eggs, fortified breakfast cereals, green vegetables and red meat.

A lack of **Zinc** results in poor growth, frequent infection, skin problems and hair / nail growth. Pork, liver, dark poultry meat, beef, eggs, cheese and beans are foods that are rich in **Zinc**.

During adolescence, 45% of the adult skeleton is formed. **Calcium** is crucial for bones health. Canned sardines, tofu, pulses, almonds, broccoli, fortified bread and dairy products are rich sources.

Magnesium is also essential in bone formation and enhances calcium absorption in the body, transmission of nerves and muscle contraction. It is found in wholegrain products, cereals, nuts and seeds. Taking 150 - 200 mg of **Magnesium**-only supplement daily aids in preventing muscle cramps, palpitation, premenstrual syndrome and insomnia.

Omega 3 which is found mainly in oily fish, such as mackerel and other cold water fishes, should be eaten 2-3 times a week. Among many health benefits, it is good for mental health, reducing dyslexia, curbing Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), treating depression, improving memory and learning skills. Research shows that the best source for **Omega-3s** (such as **EPA** and **DHA**) come from high quality purified fish oil supplement.

Besides the above-mentioned, it is also vital to replenish the bodily fluids with pure and clean drinking water! The fluid requirement for 11 - 15 years of age is 55 ml / kg / day.

E.g. A 14 year-old weighing 48 kg needs at least: $55 \times 48 = 2640$ ml of water daily.

Distressing symptoms, such as hives, itching, rashes, nasal congestion, vomiting, diarrhoea and abnormal cravings are all possible indications of an allergic reaction. An allergy arises when one is unable to digest certain food components and it is recommended that the victim of the allergy consult a qualified nutritionist or doctor to steer clear of future allergic reactions.