



ST. DAMIAN'S R.C SCIENCE
COLLEGE

Healthy Eating for Teenagers

TEENAGERS

Teenage years see many changes to your body and your lifestyle. Eating a healthy, varied diet and keeping active will be good for your health and may help you deal with times of stress, for example; exams, moving from school to college and family situations.

It may also help you to develop healthy eating and lifestyle habits and can hopefully last you for life.

GROWTH

Your teenage years are a time of rapid growth and development, and the requirements for some nutrients, like calcium and phosphorus, is fairly high.

The age at which you have a growth spurt will vary, but in girl's growth spurt normally peaks at 12.5 years and in boys at age 14 years.

A TEENAGE LIFESTYLE

Many lifestyle changes take place when you're a teenager!

When you start secondary school, you often have more independence and therefore freedom to choose what you want to eat and how you spend your free time. It's important that you don't spend too much time sitting down and that you keep active.

Young people should try and do at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day, ranging between moderate (e.g. walking or cycling) and vigorous activity (e.g. running or football). On three days a week you should also do activities that include exercises for strong muscles and bones, such as push-ups, jumping or running.

It isn't just organized activities that count though, as other activities that could be part of your daily routine count too, such as walking or cycling to school or college. This time can be a great opportunity to join a club if you like team sports, which is also a great way to meet new friends.

This is also a time in your life when you might become more aware of your own body and feel pressure from your friends, peers and the media to look a certain way – for example, social pressure to be thin or muscular.

The pressure can lead some teens to exercise excessively, skip meals and follow unnecessary weight loss diets, which in extreme cases can lead to eating disorder such as bulimia and anorexia nervosa.

BEING A HEALTHY WEIGHT

With media promoting the ‘thin’ body ideal, it may be difficult to know what a healthy weight is and how it can be achieved. The Internet may be full of ideas for miracle diets but **people come in all different shapes and sizes**, and by eating a healthy, varied diet and taking part in physical activity then your weight should stay healthy.

If you are concerned about your weight and whether it is healthy or not, contact your Head of Year or your Student Support Officer.

OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

Being overweight or obese can affect your self-esteem and increase the risk of a number of health conditions including type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

If you are overweight, eating a healthy, varied diet and maintaining an active lifestyle can help you to lose weight.

This will also help you feel better too as you are giving your body all the nutrients, vitamins and minerals it needs.

FAD DIETS

If you are worried about your weight, don't be tempted to follow one of the popular ‘fad’ or ‘crash’ diets (diets that seriously limit the amount of food you can eat or ban food groups from the diet completely). These might lead to weight loss in the short term but these types of diets are often very difficult to maintain and as soon as you start eating normally again, you are likely to put some, if not all, the weight

back on. They can also make you feel unwell as they can leave the body lacking in energy and a number of important nutrients. These diets can also have other unpleasant side effects, for example, cutting out carbohydrates leaves you feeling tired and irritable, suffering from headaches, nausea, dehydration and dizziness – hardly a quick fix to feeling great about yourself!

Skipping meals, especially breakfast, doesn't help either as this can leave you feeling so hungry that all you can think about is food. Eating breakfast has also been linked to a lower risk of gaining weight.

Eating a varied diet and keeping active will help you maintain a healthy weight and a healthy attitude towards food!

TOP HEALTHY EATING TIPS FOR TEENS

As your teenage years are such an important time for growth and development, a healthy, varied diet is essential to ensure that you receive all the energy and nutrients you need to concentrate well at school and participate in sports and activities.

Here are some top tips for healthy eating:

- **Don't skip breakfast.** Some people think that not eating breakfast will help them to lose weight, but this meal is important for you. By the time you get up, it has been a long time since you last ate, so breakfast will boost energy levels. Here are some ideas:
 - Wholegrain toast with low-fat spread, a glass of orange juice and a low-fat yogurt;
 - A bowl of cereal (low in fat, salt and sugars) with low-fat milk (e.g. 'green' semi-skimmed milk, 'orange' 1% milk or 'red' skimmed milk), and an apple or banana;
 - Porridge with chopped banana and a handful of blueberries or dried fruit;
 - Boiled egg and toast and a fruit smoothie.

Skipping meals won't help you lose weight, a healthy balanced diet is the way to go. Dieting, skipping breakfast or starving yourself don't work.

- **Eat three meals a day; breakfast, lunch and dinner.** Make sure each meal includes at least one portion of fruit or vegetables (they contain lots of vitamins and minerals) and plenty of starchy foods such as whole wheat pasta, wholemeal bread or potatoes with their skins. Make sure that you eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day (fresh, frozen, canned and dried all count).

- **Boost your iron.** If you feel run down, you may be low on iron. It is important to eat plenty of foods containing iron, especially for girls who lose iron when they have their period. Iron is important for making red blood cells, which carry oxygen around the body. Almost 50% of teenage girls do not get enough iron in their diet. Sources of iron include:
 - Red meat and liver;
 - Wholegrains (e.g. wholemeal bread);
 - Iron-fortified breakfast cereals;
 - Dark green vegetables;
 - Beans (e.g. red kidney beans, chickpeas);
 - Dried fruits (e.g. figs, raisins) and seeds (e.g. sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds).

- **Build up your bones.** As teenagers, you need high amounts of calcium because your bones are growing in size and density. The exact age at which the amount of bone tissue in the skeleton (known as bone mass) peaks is unclear, but it normally happens between the ages of 18-25 years, when bones reach their maximum strength and density. At least 90 percent of peak bone mass is acquired by the time you reach the end of your teenage years, which makes youth the best time to “invest” in your bone health. The best sources of calcium include:
 - Dairy products such as milk, yogurt and cheese – try to choose low-fat versions if possible;
 - White and brown bread (as in the UK, calcium is added to flour by law);

- Calcium-fortified dairy alternatives, such as those made from soya (very important if you are vegan or don't eat dairy products);
 - Calcium-fortified breakfast cereals;
 - Dark green vegetables;
 - Fish that is eaten with the bones (e.g. canned sardines or canned salmon).
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- **Drink plenty of fluids**, especially when taking part in exercise and physical activity, as the body loses water as sweat.
 - Aim for about 8-10 glasses each day. The best sources of fluid include water and low-fat milk. Unsweetened fruit juice should be limited to a small 150ml glass a day. Try to avoid too many sugars-containing drinks and energy drinks, especially between meals as they could harm your teeth.
 - Whilst alcohol is widely available, it is important to remember that it is illegal to buy alcohol if you are under 18 years. You may think that alcohol makes people feel happier, more confident and less stressed, but alcohol is a depressant drug so will make you feel depressed, clumsy and affect your speech. Drinking larger amounts can cause people to become aggressive and argumentative. Drinking alcohol can also leave you feeling hungover – which may include having a headache, feeling tired, thirsty and sick, and you may also feel depressed and have a low mood.
 - Besides hangovers, alcohol can also have more serious effects on your health, including liver problems, reduced fertility, high blood pressure, increased risk of various cancers and heart attack. As alcohol contains calories, it can cause you to put on weight, and can leave your skin looking pale, grey and dehydrated. It's also the main cause of accidents at home.

- **Limit how much fast-food you eat.** These foods can be high in fat, salt and/or sugars, which can be bad for our health when eaten in large amounts.
- **Snack sensibly.** If you are hungry between meals, go for healthier snack choices such as:
 - Fruit (fresh or dried)
 - Small handful of unsalted mixed nuts and/or seeds
 - Low-fat yogurts
 - Wholemeal pitta bread with lower-fat dips e.g. reduced-fat houmous or salsa.

As a teenager, your body is going through many physical changes – changes that need to be supported by a healthy, balanced diet.

Eating healthily doesn't have to mean giving up your favourite foods. It simply means eating a variety of foods and cutting down on food and drinks high in fat and sugar, such as sugary fizzy drinks, crisps, cakes and chocolate. These foods should be eaten less often and in smaller amounts.

If you're watching your weight, a healthy, balanced diet is the way to go. Dieting, skipping breakfast or starving yourself don't work.