

Tackling Teen Tastes

Nutrition basics for your growing child

by **MADELEINE GREY**

Just when parents hope to see the light at the end of the nutritional tunnel, along comes teenage-dom with the ultimate challenge. Adolescence screams out for good nutrition. Those stretching limbs crave vitamins and minerals for that final push into adult-sized bodies. But the young brains attached to those bodies often have another agenda, which puts pop, fast food and junky snacks at the top of the list. Sound like fighting material?

“What would be the point?” says Ruth West, a community dietitian in Edmonton. “They’re at the age when they want to be independent and make their own food choices outside of the home and, frankly, it’s up to them.” While parents have little control over what goes into the mouths of their children when they’re out, they can take control at home by supplying healthy meals and snacks.

Here’s where to start:

Calcium If pressed to choose one nutrient most lacking in a teen’s diet, West



The Dish on Portions

calories	210
protein	18.4 g
fat	12.1 g
carbohydrates	6.4 g
folate	12%*
iron	16%*
niacin	36%*
zinc	53%*

*of recommended daily amount

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points to this bone-building mineral and worries that soft drink consumption is too high among teens. According to a 2002 study, adolescent boys are drinking 30 oz of pop but just 12 oz of milk, while the girls are drinking 20 oz of pop and just a cup of milk.

(That’s compared with the 3 to 4 cups of milk recommended daily in *Canada’s Food Guide to Healthy Eating*.) Based on such findings, West predicts “horrendous rates” of osteoporosis in 20 years. But we may not have to wait that long. Already, West can cite studies showing that girls who don’t drink milk have higher bone fracture rates than girls who do drink milk.

Teen boys need calcium too — the recommended daily intake for both sexes aged 9 to 18 is 1300 mg — and there are plenty of non-dairy sources. A handful of almonds, a serving of tofu (made with calcium sulphate, check labels) or a cup of calcium-fortified orange juice, soy or rice drinks are all good choices. Teen-friendly dairy selections include a chunk of cheese, a dish of yogurt or even a big scoop of ice cream.

Vitamin D West says this is the second-most important nutrient for teens

Grab and Go Snacks

Calcium sources

- bottled flavoured milks
- smoothies (made with milk or silken tofu)
- single-serving yogurts
- low-fat cheese strings
- whole wheat bagel with cream cheese
- sports bottles filled with calcium-fortified soy/rice drinks or orange juice
- almond milk
- low-fat frozen yogurt
- bag of almonds

Iron sources

- snack bags filled with dried fruit
- whole wheat pita stuffed with hummus
- pâté and crackers
- lean meat sandwiches on whole wheat bread
- fortified breakfast cereals
- roast beef wrap on whole wheat tortilla
- peanut butter crackers
- bean burritos

Homemade Teenburger

When you make them from scratch, hamburgers can be guaranteed low fat with as many delicious toppings as you dare to prepare. I grate the onion so no one knows it's there. Serve on whole wheat buns.

1 lb (500 mL)	lean ground beef
1	omega-3 egg
½ cup (125 mL)	wheat germ
½	cooking onion, grated
2 tbsp (30 mL)	soy sauce
	freshly ground black pepper

In a large bowl, combine beef, egg, wheat germ, onion, soy sauce and pepper. Mix well with your hands and form patties. Spray a non-stick frying pan lightly with cooking oil and heat to medium high (or heat up the grill). Cook patties 5 to 6 minutes per side, or until no longer pink inside. (Due to E. coli, it's not safe to serve hamburgers rare. Cook fully.)

Makes 4 to 6 patties.

Topping tips for experimental teens

- Make caramelized onions by slowly sautéing sliced onions in a non-stick frying pan for about 20 minutes. Stir infrequently to encourage caramelizing. Add a little salt and a splash of balsamic vinegar to knock up the taste.
- Buy a tray of sliced button mushrooms. Sauté in 1 tbsp butter or olive oil in a non-stick frying pan. Takes about 5 minutes or until the 'shrooms start to expel juices.
- Several thin slices of cheddar cheese placed on each patty during the last 2 minutes of cooking make a great cheeseburger.
- Dijon mustard, salsa, ketchup, even fruit chutneys are all delicious non-fat toppings.
- Crisp it up with a handful of spring mix, alfalfa sprouts, grated carrots, sliced tomatoes or sliced pickles.

Our recipe tester, Adell Shneer, tests our Nutrition column using both imperial and metric measurements. However, proportions in the metric version may differ slightly from the original, causing small variations in the result.

because it's critical for bone growth and development. While sunshine supplies vitamin D, it's not strong enough to do the job from September to April in Canada. Blame it on the weatherman, but we've got to get vitamin D from somewhere. The solution comes in the form of milk, fortified (thanks to Health Canada) with vitamin D. It seems like good logic, but milk products such as yogurt, cheese and ice cream are *not* fortified with vitamin D. (Some soy and rice drinks are fortified with D. Check labels to be sure.)

Iron That incredible growth spurt you're witnessing means teens need

iron. According to West, during puberty, a boy's body increases its production of red blood cells — the exact opposite of anemia. Meanwhile, menstruation increases a girl's monthly iron loss, which, in turn, needs replenishing. The result? Teens need more iron: Boys aged 9 to 13 need 8 mg a day, while 14- to-18-year-olds require 11 mg a day. Girls aged 9 to 13 need 8 mg a day, and those 14 to 18, 15 mg a day. Where to get it? One large egg supplies 0.6 mg, half a chicken breast provides 1 mg, and a deck-of-cards-sized serving of steak has 3 mg.

Things can get complicated, though,

if, during the growth spurt years, your teen experiments with vegetarianism, saying sayonara to red meat — one of the highest sources of iron. The nutritional stakes escalate as teens eliminate healthy foods from the diet. Meat, fish, poultry, eggs and milk can be successfully removed, but healthful choices (such as soy products and foods fortified with B₁₂) have to take their place.

When teens don't get enough iron, they give new meaning to the words wiped out. While sleeping in is a badge of honour for teens, sawing too many logs can be a sign of iron deficiency.

Be a model of healthy eating. "Never encourage a teen to diet," says Bev Callaghan, a Toronto dietitian and co-author of *SupperTime Survival*. "Most children go on their first diet as a teen, but it's not a solution." Dieting can lead to a roller-coaster ride of dieting and overeating.

The best tactic a parent can take is leading by example. "Our children are watching us," says Callaghan, who stresses the importance of families exercising and eating together. "It's up to parents to choose foods wisely at the store and be a proper gatekeeper."

That means taking a good hard look at what's usually in those cupboards and on refrigerator shelves. West says that when teens raid the kitchen, they're searching for something fast and easy. If chips, cookies, high-fat convenience foods or sugary treats are regulars in your pantry, they will be the mainstay of your teen's diet too. "What you bring into the home," West points out, "is what you all end up eating."

While teens are wont to spend time with peers, draw them home by their ever-hungry stomachs, providing regular family meals and a fridge stocked with healthy snacks. Because other than MSN and a cellphone, a wide-open fridge can be a teen's best friend. ♥

Today's Parent

Get more nutrition advice and family meal suggestions in Madeleine Greey's food forum on September 6: Todayparent.com/forums.