

Teen Food & Fitness

Healthy Ideas for Middle and High School Students

September 2009



FAST TAKES

Eat here

Does your family eat meals or snacks in front of the TV? Consider making it a rule that food be eaten only in the kitchen or dining room. Making food off limits in the rest of your home will encourage kids and adults alike to eat only when they're really hungry.

Play catch

Summer may be winding down, but don't put your baseball gloves away!



Play catch with your child, and see how many throws you can each make without missing. Organize a neighborhood softball

game. Or suggest Monkey in the Middle: Two players throw the ball back and forth while a third player tries to catch it.

Did You Know?

Washing your hands is one of the best ways to stay healthy. Remind your teen that it's especially important to wash up before eating or cooking. She should use hot water and scrub with plenty of soap. A good way to time herself? Have her count slowly to 30.

Just for fun

Q: What is harder to catch the faster you run?

A: Your breath.



Food for thought

You know that eating right and exercising can keep your child's body in shape. But did you know that certain foods can help his brain work better? Here's a guide to the foods that will help your youngster think and work his best.

Healthy fats. Your teen may find it easier to learn and remember information if he eats salmon and walnuts. Why? Because these foods are high in omega-3 fatty acids, which help the brain function smoothly. Encourage him to have three or four servings a week of foods rich in omega 3. *Other sources:* soybeans, sunflower seeds, eggs, tofu.

Antioxidants. Berries (blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, and raspberries) are chock-full of antioxidants, which keep brain cells healthy. Suggest that your child eat a bowl of fresh berries or put them on cereal, oatmeal, pancakes, or yogurt. *Other sources:* raisins, red grapes, kiwi, kale, broccoli.

Cafeteria choices

School lunches are healthier than ever. Many now include fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and reduced-fat pizza. Share these tips to help your youngster choose the best possible meals:

- Read the lunch menu each week. Planning ahead often leads to a more balanced diet.
- Select items from a variety of food groups: grains, fruits, vegetables, protein, dairy.
- Have salad as a main course or side dish. Either way, make it heavy on fresh vegetables and fruits and light on higher-calorie items like potato salad, croutons, and dressing.
- Choose water or fat-free milk. ●



Folic acid. This important vitamin—also called folate—can keep your teen's memory sharp. Use raw spinach leaves instead of lettuce in sandwiches and salads. *Other sources:* avocados, oranges, fortified cereals, whole-wheat bread.

Protein. Meat and dairy products are high in protein, the building block of brain cells. A serving of protein at each meal can help your child think clearly and stay alert all day. *Other sources:* eggs, beans, peanut butter.

Tip: Regular exercise is also good for your teen's mind. Suggest that he work out or go for a run after school to recharge before starting homework. ●



After-school snacking

Snacks give your growing teen a much-needed energy boost between lunch and dinner. Follow these ideas to help her make healthy choices:

- Fill your refrigerator with snacks that you and your child prepare ahead of time. For instance, stuff whole-wheat pitas with tomato sauce and shredded skim mozzarella cheese. She can pop one in the microwave for an instant pizza pocket. Or, if



you make chicken for dinner, slice extra and put together sandwiches on whole-grain bread.

- Prepared snacks are okay sometimes, but there can be a surprising difference among brands. Some “whole grain” granola bars have less whole grain than others. And some varieties of dried fruit have added sugar. Be sure to read the ingredient lists and nutrition fact labels before choosing snacks.

- Encourage your youngster to take healthy snacks to sports practices or to her job so she won't be tempted by fast food. She can pack unsalted pretzels, carrot sticks, or an orange. ●

ACTIVITY CORNER

A running routine

Running builds endurance, strengthens muscles, and relieves stress. As an added bonus, it's free! Here are ways your teenager can start a running regimen.

Train for a cause

Suggest that she sign up for a charity run. She can train by running slightly longer distances each day. Keep an eye on the newspaper for announcements, or contact your local United Way (www.unitedway.org).



Join the crowd

Running with others is a great motivator. If your child likes competition, she might enjoy being on her school's track or cross-country team. Your community may also have a running group. Or consider running with your youngster. It's a great way for you both to stay in shape—and to stay connected with each other. ●

In the Kitchen

Apple-icious!

Does your teen know there are more than 7,500 varieties of apples in the world? Bring home different kinds (Gala, Golden Delicious, Granny Smith) for him to sample. Then, try a few in these easy recipes.

Apple salad

Cut one apple and two celery stalks into thin sticks. Toss with 1 tsp. lemon juice, 1 tbsp. low-fat mayonnaise, and 1 tsp. Dijon mustard. Top with chopped walnuts.

Apple waffles

Peel and slice two apples. Place in a skillet with 1 tsp. butter and 1 tsp. brown sugar. Stir over medium-high heat until soft. Spoon onto toasted whole-wheat waffles, and sprinkle with cinnamon.

Apple sandwich

Layer thinly sliced apples with brie cheese and honey mustard on whole-wheat bread. Wrap in foil, and warm for 10 minutes at 350°. Or make a sandwich with sliced apples and creamy peanut butter. ●



Q & A No more PE?

Q: Now that my son is a junior, gym class isn't required. How can I make sure he still gets enough exercise every day?

A: If your child didn't sign up for PE this semester, he'll need to fit in physical activity outside of school hours. Suggest that he walk or bike to school and join a school sports team. He could also swim, play

racquetball, or sign up for a fitness class at a local recreation center or YMCA.

Add exercise to your teen's routine at home, too. Take a family walk after dinner, or ask for his help with chores that will break a sweat, such as weeding the garden or cleaning out closets.

When your son registers for classes next year, remind him that he can take PE as an elective. It's good exercise, it'll give him a nice break from sitting in classes, and it's a fun way to work out with friends. ●



OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for their children.

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