

# Teen Food & Fitness

Healthy Ideas for Middle and High School Students

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## FAST TAKES

### Increase activity gradually

If your tween begins a new workout routine or wants to take her activity up a notch, easing into it can prevent injury. Encourage her to gradually increase either the duration *or* the intensity. That means she might run farther each time or run the same distance but try to improve her speed.

### Time for lunch

Talk to your child about the importance of eating lunch every day. Let him know that if he skips lunch or



eats too many sweets, he may feel tired and

have trouble concentrating in the afternoon. *Tip:* Have him make sure he has money in his cafeteria account.

### Did You Know?

Blueberries and leafy greens like spinach are known for being “super foods” (packed with multiple nutrients). For a tasty smoothie, your teen could blend 1 cup each frozen blueberries, fresh spinach, and coconut water (or plain water), 1 small ripe banana (broken into chunks),  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup plain Greek yogurt, and a dash of cinnamon.

### Just for fun

**Q:** Why did the chicken cross the playground?

**A:** To get to the other slide.



## My food and fitness journal

Your teen may be surprised by how many sweets or how few green vegetables he eats in one week. Or he may be pleased about how much physical activity he’s getting in. Keeping a journal will reveal his healthy and not-so-healthy habits and can motivate him to make positive changes. Share these steps.



### 1. Get started

For one week, have your child write down everything he eats and how and when he exercises. He could use a notebook, a computer file, or even a mobile app as his journal. *Idea:* Consider having the entire family do the same so you can remind and motivate each other!

### 2. Be specific

Encourage him to write how much—in addition to *what*—he eats. So instead of “nuts,” he’d write “ $\frac{1}{4}$  cup almonds.” Likewise, he should include specifics about his physical activity (“played tennis for 30 minutes” vs. “tennis”).

### 3. Give context

Mentioning where he was, who he was with, and how he felt can help your tween

understand his eating and activity patterns. *Examples:* “Ate breakfast at school with Scott,” “Ran 1 mile on the track in PE,” “Was starving before dinner.”

### 4. Review entries

At the end of the week, your teen can look over his journal to see trends. For instance, maybe he’s so hungry for dinner that he eats until he’s stuffed. Or perhaps he notices he’s more motivated when he runs with classmates rather than alone.

### 5. Plan ahead

Have your child track again next week, making tweaks based on what he discovered. He could start eating a healthier snack after school to tide him over until dinner, or he might plan to work out with friends on the weekend. ♥

## Snap what you eat

Food photos are everywhere these days. Here’s how this trend can encourage your tween to enjoy healthy meals:

- A plate that includes different-color foods not only makes a more interesting photo—it’s typically more nutritious. Suggest that your child make her meal as colorful as possible, then take a photo before she digs in.
- Let your teen make her photos into recipe cards. She could take pictures of her favorite healthy dishes and tape the recipe to the back. *Idea:* Use her recipe cards to plan family meals. ♥



# A fruit and a veggie with every meal

You may have heard that fruits and vegetables should take up half of your plate—but how can you make that happen at every meal? Ask your tween or teen to help you! Try these ideas.

**Mix and match.** Have your child write the names of fruits and veggies on separate slips of paper. She should put the fruits in



one bag and the vegetables in another and pull out one of each. Can she think of a creative way to combine them? *Examples:* Baked acorn squash with apple chunks, kale salad topped with raspberries.

**Make a swap.** Ask your teen to think of a meal your family eats often, such as burgers, pizza, or tacos. Then, she could swap at least one part of it for a fruit or a vegetable. She might suggest lettuce leaves in place of burger buns, pineapple instead of pepperoni, or black beans and rice in stuffed tomatoes rather than in taco shells. ♥

## Q & A Navigating convenience stores

**Q:** My daughter often stops at the convenience store with her friends after lacrosse practice, then comes home having eaten a bag of chips or a candy bar. How can I encourage her to make better choices?

**A:** Convenience stores are selling more healthy items these days. Stop by one together, and look for the most nutritious options. Your daughter might find fresh fruit near the cash register. Or perhaps you'll point out a refrigerator section stocked with string cheese, carrot sticks, hummus, and hard-boiled eggs.



Tell your child to also keep in mind that food usually costs more at a convenience store. Ask her how much she typically spends during one of these pit stops. If she and her friends pack nutritious snacks instead, they could save their money for something more fun than a convenience store—perhaps going to the movies together. ♥



## ACTIVITY CORNER

### The family that exercises together...

One of the best ways to encourage your tween to be more active is to join him. Consider these suggestions.

#### Run for charity

Ask your child to find a charity run for a cause he cares about, such as homelessness or animal rights. Sign your family up, and then train together. *Bonus:* Running alongside each other may also let you catch up on what's happening in his life.

#### Try something different

Look for an activity that's new to everyone, such as paddleboarding, obstacle course racing, ga-ga (a gentler version of dodgeball), or a martial art like judo or kung fu. You'll all be beginners, so you can learn together.

#### Dance the chores away

Supercharge your chore list with music. Crank up the stereo, and get everyone dancing while you sweep, dust, and mop. You'll work up a sweat, and chores will be finished in no time. ♥



## In the Kitchen

### Sheet-pan fish dinners

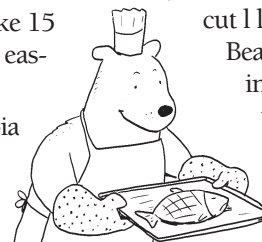
One-pan meals make dinner easy to prepare and clean up. Preheat the oven to 400°, and use a baking sheet for these recipes.

**Lemon-dill salmon.** Arrange 1 lb. salmon fillets and 4 cups fresh green beans on a pan. Combine  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup lemon juice with 2 tbsp. fresh dill. Brush on fish and drizzle over beans. Bake 15 minutes or until salmon flakes easily with a fork.

**Tilapia fajitas.** Place 1 lb. tilapia on a sheet, and add 2 cups sliced bell peppers, mushrooms, and onion. Sprinkle

with 1 tbsp. olive oil and 1 tbsp. low-sodium taco seasoning. Bake 15 minutes or until fish flakes. Serve in whole-grain tortillas with shredded lettuce, diced tomato, and salsa.

**Fish and chips.** Cut 3 large sweet potatoes into strips. Toss with 1 tbsp. canola oil, and roast for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, cut 1 lb. cod fillets into "tenders." Beat 2 eggs in a bowl. Coat fish in egg, and roll in 1 cup whole-wheat bread crumbs. Add to pan, and bake 15–20 minutes more, until cod is golden brown. ♥



### OUR PURPOSE

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

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Teen Food & Fitness™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.

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