

Teen Food & Fitness

Healthy Ideas for Middle and High School Students

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Washington County Virginia Public Schools
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FAST TAKES

Healthy selfies

Snapping a selfie is a quick way for your tween to capture how good she feels when she exercises or enjoys a nutritious meal. She can challenge friends to join the fun—they'll motivate each other to be active and eat right. They might share post-workout pictures of themselves eating colorful salads, for example.

Did You Know?

Encourage your teen to sit on a balance ball while he reads or does homework. By



engaging his torso muscles to keep the ball steady, he'll improve posture, balance, and strength. Look for a ball that lets him sit

with his feet flat on the floor and his knees at a 90-degree angle.

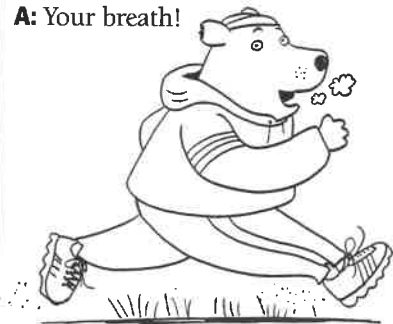
Start a dinner club

With a monthly potluck dinner club, your child can practice cooking nutritious foods. Suggest that she and her friends take turns hosting. The host picks a theme (say, Mexican), and everyone brings a healthy dish (turkey tacos, cilantro-lime brown rice).

Just for fun

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

A: Your breath!



Eating the right amount

Building good food habits is not just about *what* your tween or teen eats, but also about *how much* he eats. Share these tips to keep him from overeating.

Slow down

It can take 15 minutes for the brain to realize the stomach is full—a delay that may lead to eating too much. To allow time for the message to get through, your teenager might:

- Set down his fork between bites.
- Chew slowly, and focus on the flavors.
- Wake up earlier to allow enough time for breakfast, or eat breakfast at school.

Divide and conquer

Help your tween outsmart the urge to “eat the whole thing” by suggesting that he:

- Dish up a serving instead of eating directly from a carton or bag.
- Split a restaurant meal with a friend, or box up half to take home.
- Create single-serving portions. For example, fill baggies with a helping of trail mix, and cut cheese into 1-oz. cubes.



Avoid distracted dining

Your child may overeat when he's focused on the TV, his phone, or his homework. To keep his mind on his food, he should:

- Always sit down to eat.
- Leave electronics in another room.
- Have a snack in the kitchen rather than at his desk.

Idea: Smaller dishes fool the mind into thinking you're eating more. Consider serving dessert in cups rather than bowls, for instance. ●

Family fitness traditions

Holidays don't have to focus solely on food. Make being active a new tradition with these suggestions.

Catch up over catch. Stand in a circle, and toss a ball around—asking a question on every third or fourth throw. You tween might ask her uncle, “What's your favorite book?” He can answer her question while everyone continues throwing the ball. Then, her uncle gets to ask someone else a question.

Take an active neighborhood tour. Let your teen lead everyone on a brisk walk around the block. Stop at a basketball court to shoot hoops or at a soccer field to kick goals. She might also introduce younger cousins to the local playground. ●



School lunch: Hot and healthy

Cafeteria lunches make it easy for your teen to choose nutritious (and delicious) options to fuel her body and brain. Here are ways to help her get the most out of school meals.

Review the menu. Keep a copy of the cafeteria menu at home (or look it up online), and talk about it with your tween. What looks good this week? At dinner or after school, ask what she ate—and why she picked it. You'll learn about her preferences and show that you're interested in her day.



Try new things. Schools offer a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, which are all important for a healthy lifestyle. Challenge your child to sample new foods that incorporate these options like spinach-artichoke flatbread pizza. *Idea:* Ask her to share suggestions on how you can “healthy up” favorites at home, too.

Tip: Your teenager may qualify for free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch. Check with her school for details and to apply. ●

PARENT TO PARENT

Emotional eating

I noticed that my daughter, Corinne, was snacking a lot more than usual. When I mentioned it to her, she got upset and said she was stressed about everything she had to do.

I told Corinne I understood how she felt. Sometimes when I'm stressed, I just want to eat cookies and chips, too. But then I realize what I'm doing and ask myself if I'm really hungry, or if I'm “stress eating.” If it's the latter, I try to find a healthier alternative like taking a walk or reading a chapter of a novel.

The other day while Corinne was taking a study break, she came into the kitchen, grabbed an apple—and asked if I'd go for a quick walk with her. I guess she was listening, and I'm happy that she's trying to make better choices. ●

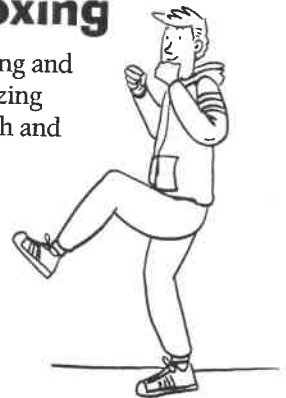


ACTIVITY CORNER

Kudos for kickboxing

Your tween can get his heart pumping and boost his confidence with these energizing kickboxing moves. *Tip:* He could start with 10 reps for each and work up to more as he builds endurance.

- 1. Front kick.** Plant your feet shoulder-width apart, lift your right knee so your thigh is parallel to the floor, and “kick” straight out with the ball of your foot. Repeat with your left leg.
- 2. Punch and kick.** Squat with your feet shoulder-width apart and fists in front of your face. Straighten your legs, and punch forward with your right fist while kicking with your right foot. Return to the starting position, and repeat using your left side.
- 3. Front and back.** Raise your fists in front of your face, and step forward with your left foot. Kick your left leg out in front of you. Lower your left leg, and immediately kick your right leg backward to complete the move. Now switch legs, starting with your right leg. ●



In the Kitchen DIY food gifts

Homemade food gifts are a fun and low-cost way for you and your teen to spread holiday cheer! Consider these ideas that look nice in clear glass jars.

Strawberry-chia seed jam

Cook 2 cups frozen strawberries in a pot over medium heat until the berries break down, 5–10 minutes. Stir in 1 tbsp. lemon juice and 2 tbsp. honey. Remove from heat. Sprinkle with 2 tbsp. chia seeds (or sesame seeds), and let cool and thicken. Refrigerate.



Winter spice mix

Using ground spices, combine $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cinnamon, 1 tbsp. nutmeg, 1 tbsp. allspice, and $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. ginger. Add a label to the jar noting that the blend can add flavor to sweet potatoes, oatmeal, or warm milk.

Sunflower seed butter

Roast 2 cups shelled, unsalted sunflower seeds in a single layer on a pan at 350° until fragrant, about 10 minutes. In a blender or food processor, blend 5–7 minutes until smooth. Stir in a pinch of salt, and keep refrigerated. ●

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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