

A report on nutritional habits of teenagers and recommendations

[Food & Diet](#)



A teenager should be eating the correct amount of fruits and vegetables as they are incredibly important in everyone's diet and a teenager should be eating a minimum amount of around 2 cups of fruit and 3 cups of vegetables daily as they contain many kinds of vitamins and minerals such as vitamin C which boosts your immune system and if you don't consume enough vitamin C then you could get scurvy which is the vitamin deficiency and some of the symptoms are: Bruising, bleeding gums, weakness, fatigue and rashes. That is only one of the reasons to eat fruit and vegetables but other reasons are that it is good for your heart, can prevent obesity, prevents you from feeling fatigued and can prevent type 2 diabetes along with other diseases and even some cancers.

Teenagers should also be eating meat or meat alternatives such as red meat, chicken and fish are high in protein which is needed for muscle repair and growth. Due to teenagers still growing and taking part in physical activities, they require protein in their diets for growth and strength as well as to reduce muscle pain after intensive exercise.

Natural protein rich foods are also an option for vegetarians and vegans do not eat meat they still need protein, especially if they are physically active. They can substitute proteins that are found in animals with plant sources such as quinoa, soy, buckwheat and many more examples that all contain high levels of protein.

Teenagers require milk and milk products in their diet in order to strengthen their bones and teeth as it contains calcium. The calcium is needed for teenagers because many are still growing. They also need this food group as

it will prevent them from getting a calcium deficiency such as Osteoporosis. The calcium deficiencies will likely only take place later in their lives but by receiving enough calcium now; they lessen the chance of this happening in the future.

Grains are an important part of your daily meals and a teenager should eat around 6 servings of grains a day, 3 of which should be whole grains, if possible. Grains contain protein, a few vitamins, zinc, iron and complex carbohydrates which are healthier and whole grains also contain fibre which has multiple benefits to the consumer e. g. preventing constipation.

Teenagers need enough calories to function efficiently but not too much. A teenage girl needs around 2200 calories daily while a teenage boy needs around 2800 calories daily. This varies due to amount and type of physical activity or activities that they take part in as the more you do the more you burn, so if you do high intensity training often then you need to increase the amount that you consume in order to maintain your weight, if you don't consume enough calories then you could experience rapid weight loss which is not healthy. If you stop doing that physical activity e. g. you have an injury and need rest; then you will need to reduce the amount you consume to avoid rapid weight gain which could eventually lead to obesity.

What should a teenager avoid eating but generally will not?

Teenagers tend to sometimes rather eat a snack such as a cereal bar or packet of chips instead of eating a proper meal due for various reasons like not having enough time. This means that they don't get enough meals a day

because they substituted it out for something smaller, possibly higher in sugar and or possibly higher in fats.

They also generally drink large amounts of soft drinks. Some households and almost every party has soft drinks and although we know that they're high in sugar, artificial colourants, artificial flavourings and sometimes preservatives, but even with all these things as well as the effect on your teeth, most people still drink them or for the diet version which is also unhealthy due to all the artificial sugars.

Even worse than the soft drinks are the energy drinks. From my own experience; when I have 3 or 4 assignments due in a week as well as 2 tests, another 3 tests and 2 assignments due for the week after, extra lessons, trying to exercise, stress, trying to get enough sleep and still trying to balance a social life, it can be difficult. This is one of the reasons why teenagers resort to energy such as Monster and Red Bull which both have high levels of sugar and caffeine. Sometimes they are used for sport and sometimes teenagers consume them just because they enjoy feeling all the energy gives them from the large, unhealthy amounts of sugar and caffeine put in these drinks. Most people don't understand the severity of some of the side-effects that can be caused by consuming these energy supplements. A 500ml can of Monster contains 320mg of caffeine which is ridiculous considering that 100mg of caffeine a day for a teenager is unhealthy. What makes these energy drinks worse is that some teenagers consume 2 or more a day and might begin to feel dependent on these drinks. These energy drinks put increased strain on their hearts that are already working hard due

to the amount of physical activity. Other side effects are: high blood pressure, obesity, heart attacks and many more.

Survey on what teenagers are eating and if their diets are healthy or not?

Majority have enough dairy. This is good as it means that they stand a lot less susceptible to a form of calcium deficiency during the later years of their lives, which have been mentioned under what they should be eating daily.

The majority don't eat enough grains a day. There are whole grains and refined grains. Whole grains are healthier as they contain fibre while the outer layer of the kernel in refined grains is removed during the process. Grains have complex carbohydrates, iron, zinc as well as a few other vitamins. Grains can prevent diabetes and obesity, and whole grains can also prevent heart disease and some cancers. Majority of the participants do not consume enough meat which is not good as they need it for muscle repair and growth due to the physical activity or activities that they take part in. It is also needed for growth as they are still growing and are need the protein in order to help their muscles grow.

Only 20 % (6 participants) eat more or less enough fruit and veg. As I have already mentioned; they are at risk of many different diseases and illnesses due to deficiencies such as scurvy or maybe something simple like being fatigue. Their body will not be able to function properly if they don't eat the amount of fruit and vegetables that they should be, unless they are taking vitamins but even a very good multivitamin isn't as good as receiving the vitamins straight from the food source.

They do not consume a lot of fast food. 18 participants eat it monthly if at all. This is very good as a home cooked meal or even a restaurant that doesn't serve fast food is better than something like a deep fried chicken burger from KFC. It is also a pleasing result as teenagers are generally known for eating fast food often due to lack of time, money for a proper meal or sometimes just not caring. 17 of the participants frequently skip one of the main meals in their diet. By skipping meals, the teenagers do not receive enough nutrients and also mess up their metabolism and other bodily functions. It is unlikely that the teenager will be able to perform properly or at least to the best of their ability, if they do not eat the right amount of meals or try and substitute a meal with snacks. They are also more susceptible to obesity due their body's natural reaction to convert and store the foods into fat due to it feeling starved.

Only 5 said they prefer their foods fried. Fried foods are very unhealthy due to the amount of oil used that is absorbed into the food and then consumed by us. Although you can have it once in a while, it is still better to avoid fried foods where possible to avoid the unnecessary fats and oils that it contains.

What are the results of the way they are eating in the long run? Taking into consideration that although the above is what the majority answered in the survey, it does not mean that one person had the same answer as the majority for every question. This brings up the question of what if someone's answer was the same as the majority for every question. What would be a rough estimate of what their health would be like in the long run?

Assuming the teenager doesn't take any vitamins, use any alternative sources or supplements; the teenager's body functions would suffer due to a lack of protein. The teenager might also eventually develop something such as muscle wasting which is a result of a protein deficiency over a long period of time. Some other side effects of a protein deficiency are hair, nail and skin problems. Due to this teenager not eating the right amount of fruits and vegetables they are most likely going to have a weaker immune system, feel tired and fatigued and at higher risk of obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. The teenager doesn't prefer their foods fried as well as only eating fast food monthly which cuts down on unnecessary fats and oils which would only result in health issues if consumed too often. The teenager doesn't consume enough grains which put them at a slightly higher risk of heart disease, obesity, constipation and certain cancers such as colon cancer. These risks could be reduced if they received fibre from other sources such as legumes and other vegetables, but the teenager does not consume enough fruit and vegetables either which makes the chances of them receiving enough fibre low. By skipping meals the teenager also messes up their metabolism which is going to affect the general body functions.

From this it is clear that the teenager will have a higher risk of type 2 diabetes, some cancers, obesity as well as not being able to perform properly due to feeling fatigued. What would cause a teenager to eat healthier and why would it cause them to eat healthier? From my survey it is clear that teenagers will improve their diets due to sport, gym or other physical activities. This is because they care about themselves and their performance so they will make small sacrifices such as cutting out fried

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foods and high fat foods for healthier alternatives. For example: In a restaurant instead of ordering a beef burger, they would get a chicken salad which is healthier and also contains the necessary protein as well as lots of vegetables which have a lot more nutrients than the burger. The chicken is also healthier than the beef because chicken has less fat. They basically use their active lifestyle to motivate them to eat healthier and it makes a lot of sense. They work hard at what they do whether it's soccer, weight lifting, swimming or any other sport, then you wouldn't want to jeopardise your performance by eating unhealthy foods and/or not the right quantity of food.

Are these reasons negative or positive and why?

The good parts of the result was that this is a factor whereby the teenager chooses to improve their diet without being pressured by friends and family into changing their diet due to opinions that sometimes could be considered bullying or peer pressure which is harsh and doesn't give the teenager much of a choice. This is why it is much better that majority of the teenagers, who answered my survey, said that this factor (which is their own choice) is the one that would affect their diets for the better. It also means that they are less likely to smoke and do drugs because it is very well known that they will have a very large negative impact on the user's health which is why these people would be more likely to avoid them. The negative part of the results is that it is unfortunate that the majority said that school and health programs, such as talks from guest speakers, does not have much of an effect on improving their diets. But, it also shows that there is an issue with the schools' approach to educating and encouraging healthy eating as well as the health programs that these teenagers are exposed to. It makes one

question if these programs are worth the time, money and effort or maybe if the schools and speakers are aware that the results are poor but do it anyway because they feel that it's worth it if they have an effect on just a few on the teenagers they are trying to reach out to. It is also bad because it means that those who do eat fast food know that it's not healthy but still eat the food because they simply don't care for a variety of reasons.

Overall I found that the results were not too bad, especially as teenagers stereotypically have bad eating habits. They are eating most of the foods that they should be and not too much of the foods and drinks that they shouldn't be consuming, but they should put in an effort to avoid them for many reasons. In the long run the results are not too great but also not too bad, they can always be fixed by eating a little bit more of this and that. The factor that is most effective in influencing their diets is probably the best as they are not really pressured into it. It was quiet surprising that school and talks did not have a larger effect on the participants as one would expect. The conclusion is that teenagers are more likely to change their diets in order to suit their lifestyles so that all the effort they put into sport and/or gym won't be wasted by them not eating properly.