

Teen Food & Fitness

Healthy Ideas for Middle and High School Students

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Livingston Manor Central School
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FAST TAKES



Clean-out-your-fridge meals

It's fun to go through the refrigerator with your teen and create meals using a little of this and that. He might stir-fry peppers, onions, and mushrooms or create tacos from leftover chicken, tortillas, salsa, and lettuce. Or he could bake English muffin "pizzas" topped with pasta sauce, black olives, and cheese.

Get going while you're going

Suggest that your teenager use fitness as a means to go places. Instead of taking a bus, the subway, or a car, have her make the most out of going to school, work, or a friend's house by walking or biking along safe routes. It's an ideal way to add extra activity to her day!



Did You Know?

Not only have portions gotten larger, so have dinner plates. In fact, the average dinner plate today is 11–12" across, compared with 7–9" a few decades ago. That can make healthy-sized servings look small. *Easy solution:* Use salad plates, so regular-sized portions look just right.

Just for fun

Q: Why did the student eat his homework?

A: The teacher told him it was a piece of cake!



The lowdown on fast food

While it might be hard to resist a trip through the fast food lane, the good news is there are plenty of options beyond burgers and fries. Share these strategies for your teen to try.

Go grilled

Grilled chicken sandwiches, strips, and nuggets are on many fast food menus. Or there may be a grilled veggie burger—skip the mayonnaise, and consider putting the patty on a lettuce leaf rather than a bun. These protein-rich choices will keep your teenager satisfied for hours.

Seek salads

With a base of nourishing vegetables and protein, fast food salads can be a healthy meal. Encourage her to watch out for add-ons like creamy salad dressing, croutons, or bacon bits. Suggest that she stick to just one packet of her favorite dressing and skip the croutons and bacon bits (which often aren't really bacon anyway) altogether.



Swap the sides

Nowadays, you can find fruit cups, plain baked potatoes, and green side salads at most fast food chains. If your child chooses one of those over French fries or onion rings, she'll add nutrients and save on calories and saturated fat.

Idea: Then again, she might just rethink fast food completely. In a pinch? How about checking out the local supermarket first? She may find made-to-order sandwiches, brown-rice sushi, wholesome snacks, or salads that are readily available for a quick and easy meal. ♥

Set fitness goals

The thought of playing a complete basketball game or swimming several miles can be daunting, but even a marathon starts with the first mile. Help your child set—and achieve—fitness goals by taking it one step at a time. Suggest these three tips.

1. Be specific. "My goal is to swim five laps three days a week" tells him exactly what he's aiming for, rather than something general like "I'm going to get fit."

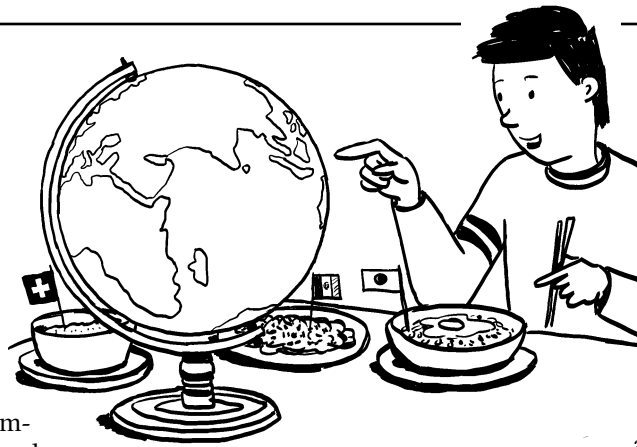
2. Give it time. The body requires time to adapt to a new routine. Try setting weekly targets for short-term goals. Remember, even Olympians had to start somewhere.

3. Overcome setbacks. Missing a day or having to work a little harder than a friend doesn't equal failure. Encourage your teenager to keep his eye on his goal—and to just keep going. ♥



Breakfast around the world

Help your tween or teen learn about different foods, flavors, and cultures from around the world right on his breakfast plate. He'll add variety to his diet as he samples healthy international dishes like these.



● **Enjoy the flavors of Mexico** with chilaquiles. In a hot skillet (coated with cooking spray), saute $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped onion and eight small corn tortillas, torn into strips. When they're browned, stir in six beaten eggs, and cook until firm. Add

● **For a Swiss twist**, make a bowl of muesli—a cereal of oats, nuts, and fruit. Your teen might blend oats with walnuts and raisins or with almonds, coconut, and blueberries. He can add milk and enjoy his muesli right away or let it soak overnight. Muesli is delicious warm or cold. ●

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup tomato salsa and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water. Simmer 10 minutes. Top with shredded cheddar cheese. Follow with a glass of horchata, a lightly sweetened cinnamon rice milk drink.

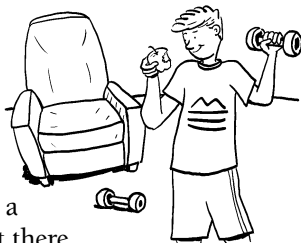
● **"Travel" to Japan** by savoring a traditional breakfast of rice topped with a sunny-side-up egg and a drizzle of low-sodium soy sauce. Add a side of broiled fish and a cup of decaffeinated tea.



Q & A Forget fad diets

Q: My son wants to lose weight and gain muscle, and I'm concerned he'll try a fad diet. What's a good alternative I can offer him?

A: There's a lot of pressure on teens to have a certain look, and fad diets may seem like a fast path to get there.



But they often forbid entire food groups and are simply not healthy for anyone, much less a growing teen.

Instead, encourage your child to add nutrients to his diet and avoid junk food. Use his interest in losing weight and gaining muscle to his advantage—suggest that he do research on a healthy eating plan.

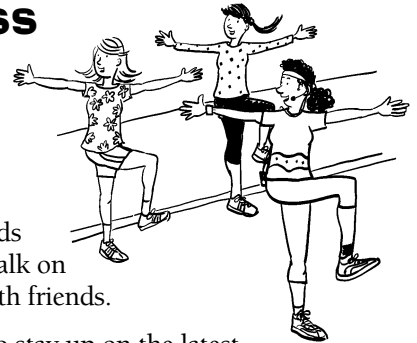
Then, he could track his intake, as well as his results. That will give him control over his diet and let him see the healthy outcome from his nutritious choices. ●

ACTIVITY CORNER

Group fitness for the win!

Play into your tween's natural desire to be with friends by encouraging her to work out in a group. Here are ideas:

- ✓ Have her set a regular date with her best friends to meet up for a long walk-and-talk. A power walk on a cold day will let her warm up and catch up with friends.
- ✓ Suggest that she take a dance class at school to stay up on the latest moves and music while working different muscle groups.
- ✓ She could sign up for an aerobics, Zumba, or strength-training class at the rec center. This is a great way to meet new friends—especially ones who also want to get or stay fit. ●



In the Kitchen

Hot soup for a cold day

Hearty (and healthy) minestrone is a flavorful soup that's full of fiber. Encourage your teen to add her favorite kinds of pasta, beans, or vegetables to make this recipe "her own."

Minestrone

- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ onion, chopped
- 1 8-oz. can corn, drained
- 6 cups vegetable broth
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup tomato paste
- 1 tsp. basil
- 1 28-oz. can chopped tomatoes, with liquid
- 1 cup small pasta shells

- 1 15-oz. can white beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 lb. fresh green beans (or frozen, thawed)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup grated Parmesan cheese

In a large pot, heat oil over medium-high heat. Saute garlic and onion until soft. Stir in corn, broth, tomato paste, basil, and tomatoes. Bring to a boil. Add the pasta, white beans, and green beans. Cook until pasta is done, about 7–8 minutes. Pour into bowls, and top with Parmesan. Serves 6. ●



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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