

5 Steps to Healthy Eating for Youth 12 - 18



Eating healthy and being physically active are important parts of being healthy and feeling good. When you eat well your body gets the nutrients and energy you need to grow. Eating well helps you concentrate and perform better in activities that are important to you like school, sports and hobbies. Being physically active helps you stay strong and fit. It can improve your confidence and lower your stress.

You will grow quickly between 12 and 18 years of age. Focus on your eating habits, physical activity and overall health rather than your body weight. Healthy bodies come in many shapes and sizes. Follow the five steps to healthy eating and active living below.

Steps You Can Take

1. Eat Meals With Your Family

Eat meals with your family whenever you can. Making mealtimes an important part of your day and enjoying meals together can help you make better food choices. Eating together can also give you a more positive outlook on life, higher self-esteem and helps you do better in school. The more often you eat together, the bigger the benefit.

Eat at least three meals each day starting with breakfast. Regular meals prevent you from getting too hungry. Being too hungry can lead to less healthy food choices.

Take part in planning and preparing family meals. Use *Canada's Food Guide* to help you and your family choose healthy foods. Include at least three of the four food groups at each meal. Try some of the ideas below:

- Include 3-4 servings of low fat milk and milk alternatives like skim or 1% milk, low fat yogurt or fortified soy beverage each day. These foods and beverages provide calcium and vitamin D for healthy bones. Try smoothies with breakfast, pack yogurt for a morning snack and drink a glass of milk at dinner.
- Choose whole grain foods when you can. They are higher in fibre and nutrients. Enjoy oatmeal or whole grain cereals for breakfast. Use whole grain breads, bagels and tortillas for sandwiches and wraps. Order pizza made with whole wheat crust.



- Include vegetables and fruit at every meal. Add berries to cereal, lettuce and tomato to sandwiches and choose vegetables like carrots and peppers for snacks. Ask your parents to buy more colourful foods like broccoli, asparagus, peas, spinach and romaine lettuce, carrots, sweet potato and squash. These foods are especially high in nutrients.
- Help plan and prepare meals with less fat. Trim the fat from meats and remove the skin from chicken. Limit breaded and deep-fried foods. Ask for or help make meals that include fish and meat alternatives such as beans, lentils and tofu more often.
- Include a small amount of unsaturated fat each day. These are healthier fats. Use soft margarine on bread or toast instead of butter. Use vegetable oil for cooking or baking instead of butter, shortening or lard. Enjoy small amounts of salad dressing, avocado or a sprinkle of nuts and seeds on salads. Limit foods high in saturated or unhealthy fats such as chips, nachos, cookies, donuts, pastries, chocolate and deep fried foods.
- Drink water when you are thirsty instead of sugary drinks like pop, juice, sweetened iced tea and sports drinks. Limit coffee and other drinks that are high in caffeine like coffee and cola. Avoid energy drinks. Caffeine can interfere with your sleep and make you anxious. Other ingredients in energy drinks can be harmful.

2. Plan and Pack Healthy Lunches and Snacks

Pack a healthy lunch rather than buying it whenever possible. Make your lunch with healthy foods that you enjoy. Include foods from at least three food groups. Pack it up before you go to bed and keep it in the fridge ready to grab in the morning.

Try these healthy lunch ideas:

- Make a tuna, salmon or egg salad sandwich on whole grain bread, bun, pita or wrap. Top with vegetables or enjoy them on the side.
- Make a veggie pizza by spreading tomato sauce or pesto on a whole grain pita. Top with your favourite vegetables and grated cheese. Roll it up. Eat it hot or cold.
- Make a noodle or quinoa salad with vegetables. Add chickpeas, beans or lentils, tuna, nuts and seeds or cheese. Top with your favourite dressing. Serve with whole grain crackers or pita.

Choose healthy snacks when you are hungry between meals. Include foods from at least two food groups. Plan to have a snack when you know there will be more than 4 or 5 hours between your meals. If you are very active you may need extra snacks. Pack healthy snacks to bring with you when you are away from home.



Try some of these healthy snack ideas:

- Cut up veggie sticks. Add hummus or a yogurt dip in a separate container.
- Make your own trail mix with a few different whole grain cereals, dried fruits nuts and seeds.
- Top a whole wheat tortilla with canned refried beans or black beans, salsa and shredded cheese. Roll up, wrap in plastic and take it with you.
- Mix low fat yogurt with fresh or frozen berries. Add your favourite whole grain cereal for some crunch.

3. Listen to Your Body

An important part of healthy eating is listening and responding to your body's signals of hunger and fullness. Trust your body when you feel hungry and when you feel full. The amount of food you need is different from other people. Eat the amount of food that feels right to you.

Try these tips to help you listen to your body:

- Eat regular meals and snacks each day to help with your hunger.
- Eat based on your hunger and fullness rather than set portion sizes or the amount of food on your plate.
- Eat a variety of foods. Include foods that you enjoy at meals and snacks.
- Take time to taste and enjoy your food. Pause once in a while during a meal to see if you are full. Stop eating when you are full. Have more if you are still hungry.
- Avoid eating while watching TV, texting or doing other activities. You can listen better to your body if you are not distracted.

4. Create an Environment that Supports Healthy Eating

Your environment includes your home, school and other places you spend time. Take a look at your environment to see if there are changes you can make.

Here are some ideas:



- Talk to your family about healthy changes you can make together. Help with meal planning and grocery shopping. Get active as a family. Play ball, go for a walk or ride your bikes together.
- When you buy food or drinks at school or restaurants, make healthier choices. Replace French fries or potato chips with a salad or other vegetables. Choose water or milk instead of sugary drinks. Go for fruit instead of sweets and desserts. Talk to your teachers or principal about how your school can provide healthy choices.
- When you are out with friends or at sports activities, pack a healthy snack instead of buying snack foods or fast foods.
- Cut back on the amount of time you spend watching TV, texting, playing video games or computer games. Use that time to do something active.
- Get nutrition information and advice from a reliable source such as a dietitian or other health professional. The messages you hear about food and nutrition from advertisements or the Internet may be incorrect or misleading.

5. Be Physically Active

Being active every day keeps your body and mind healthy and alert. Finding physical activities you enjoy helps you look forward to it and keep it up in the long term. Any activity counts. Aim for 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity each day. Here are some ideas:

Moderate-intensity physical activities (these activities make you sweat a little and breathe harder).

- Ride your bike to school or to visit your friends.
- Go for a brisk walk at lunch time or after school. Bring your friends.
- Enjoy skateboarding or swimming in the summer and skating or tobogganing in the winter.

Vigorous-intensity physical activities (these activities make you sweat and be 'out of breath').

- Train for a 5 kilometer running event.
- Sign up for after school sports activities like basketball or soccer.
- Dance to your favourite upbeat songs.



Steps for Special Consideration

Your body requires many nutrients to help you grow and be healthy. It is best to get these nutrients by eating a variety of foods from each food group in Canada's Food Guide. If you eat foods from each of the food group, a vitamin/mineral supplement is usually not necessary. Women who could become pregnant need a multivitamin containing folic acid every day.

If you are unhappy with your body weight, speak to your parents or a health professional before you try to lose weight. While you are growing, weight loss is not always recommended. An unhealthy approach to weight loss can be very harmful to your mental and physical health.