

# **How to Make Healthy Meals a 13-year-old Will Eat**

*by Pamela Fay*

Healthy eating habits are important for good health. By the time children become teenagers, they may have developed several unhealthy eating habits, including dieting, skipping meals, and heavy consumption of processed meals. Poor eating habits can result in insufficient intake of several key nutrients including vitamin A, iron and calcium. Young teens can be finicky eaters so introduce new foods slowly and sneak them into homemade recipes. A healthier diet may make a difference in your child's performance and behavior.

## **Emphasis on Whole Foods**

Purchase whole foods. Teens may get many of their calories from processed foods that have added salt, sugar and chemical additives. Buy fresh, organic fruits and vegetables in a variety of colors. Purchase whole grain breads and cereals as well as non-processed sources of lean, organic protein. If you must buy packaged foods, read the ingredients list and nutritional labels. Find brands with minimal processing and a short list of ingredients that you recognize and can pronounce.

## **Make Vegetables Delicious**

Substitute healthy ingredients in dishes the 13-year-old already enjoys. Make pizza with an extra serving of finely chopped vegetables such as bell peppers and zucchini added to a homemade tomato sauce. Replace fatty sausage or pork pepperoni with Canadian bacon. Swap full-fat cheese for reduced fat versions. For healthier burgers, add vegetables like mushrooms to ground beef. Or, forego the beef for a vegetarian patty. Add a variety of tastes and textures to salads like slivered dates, dry roasted almonds or spicy peppers. Slip a handful of spinach into a fruit smoothie. It will look like a green milk shake and the spinach taste disappears.

## **Omega 3s May Help Teen Issues**

Include sources of Omega 3s. Teens may eat too many greasy, prepared foods that are heavy on Omega 6s while not including enough Omega 3s. If your 13-year-old suffers from ADHD, depression, dyslexia or has difficulty learning, she may be deficient in Omega 3s. Although flax oil and ground flaxseed are good sources of Omega 3, a 13-year-old may prefer salmon, fresh tuna, pumpkin and walnut seeds. Chia seeds are also a good source. Add 2 tbs. of chia seed to ½ cup of water to make a tasteless gel that looks like a science experiment. You can stir this Omega 3-rich novelty into soup, smoothies or puddings.

## **Spice it Up**

Replace salt with herbs and spices. Adolescents consume the highest amount of sodium of all Americans -- over 3,800 milligrams each day. The American Heart Association recommends 1,500 milligrams. Heavy salt consumption is strongly linked to an increasingly early onset of high blood pressure and heart disease. Much of this salt is consumed through processed foods rather than added at the table. So, as you prepare

healthy meals from whole foods, reach for antioxidant rich spices like cinnamon and oregano. Your 13-year-old will not miss the salt.

### **Involve Your Teen**

Involve your 13-year-old in food preparation tasks. They may not be as eager to accompany you on a trip to the grocery store as a younger child. However, teens may enjoy tending an herb garden or learning to cook fresh bread. Once they make an investment in the meal, they are more likely to want to eat the meal.

### **References**

Adolescents Fail to Meet Recommended Dietary Requirements

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### **Resources**

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