

Does it really matter what I eat?

Yes! The old saying 'you are what you eat' has a lot of truth to it. Eating a balance of good foods, coupled with regular physical activity, will help you:

- feel great
- function at your full potential
- maintain a healthy weight

Eating well doesn't have to mean eating flavorless foods. It's about getting the balance right. Eating regularly and eating a mix of foods from all the food groups will help you get the fuel and nutrients your body needs. It's also a good idea to watch the amount of foods you are eating which are high in fat and sugar such as take aways, cakes, biscuits, chips and soft drinks. Often they are full of kilojoules (or calories) but low in useful nutrients. It's still okay to eat these foods occasionally – just try to keep the balance in favour of foods from the five food groups.

Five Food Groups

- Bread, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles
- Vegetables, legumes
- Fruit
- Milk, cheese, yogurt
- Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, legumes

How do I know if I am a healthy weight?

As a teenager your body is going through a period of huge growth and development. It is normal to gain weight during this time as your bones and muscles develop and your body shape changes.

You will probably have found that you have an enormous appetite at times. Generally if you are eating a healthy, balanced diet, your appetite will guide how much you need to be eating to provide your body with the right amount of energy (kilojoules) and nutrients for growth and for your activity level. However if you are eating too much, or too much of the wrong foods, you can become overweight. Being overweight is a problem for more reasons than just the way you look or feel. Being overweight can lead to serious health problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure or heart disease in adult life.

Similarly not eating enough (for example if you follow some fad diets) can also lead to issues of being underweight which can affect your energy levels, growth and development. It may also mean you miss out on important nutrients such as iron and calcium.

So what weight should you be? There is no specific weight that you should be at a particular age. Remember everyone is different. People vary in their height, their natural body shape (which you inherit from your parents) and the amount of muscle they carry. Also everyone has growth spurts at different times. However if you are concerned that you are either underweight or overweight, a health professional such as a doctor or dietitian can assess your growth and provide you with the right advice. Using your height and weight they can work out your body mass index (an indicator of healthy weight for height) and compare it to age specific growth charts.

What should I eat for a healthy weight?

Every month there is a new fad diet released full of promises, but unfortunately there is no miracle for achieving a healthy weight. If you are looking to lose weight it is possible to do so on a range of fad diets but most people will regain their weight once they go off the diet. Research has shown that the most effective way to achieve a healthy weight is to follow healthy eating principles (see above) and to be physically active. The aim is to develop healthy habits that will last you a lifetime.

Here are some simple tips to help improve your food intake and eating habits:

- Eat a wide variety of foods from each of the food groups.
- Don't skip meals, especially breakfast. Eating breakfast kick-starts your metabolism for the day and you are less likely to crave an unhealthy snack later in the morning.
- Think about what you are snacking on. Snacks such as chocolate and chips are high in fat. Instead try fruit, yogurt, high-fibre muffins, smoothies, fruit toast with ricotta, dried fruit and nuts.
- Limit your intake of soft drinks. Choose sugar free versions or even better drink water or low fat milk.
- Think about the size of your meal. Are you eating it because you are still hungry or just because it's there?
- Check out some of the healthier takeaway food options around now (eg sushi, salad wraps and subs, noodles and stir-frys). Many fast food chains now have healthier choices on their menu too.
- Try preparing some food yourself and compare the taste of fresh foods (and the price difference!).

For a specific healthy eating plan see an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

Nutrition for Teenagers

Why should I eat dairy foods?

Australian teenagers in general are not eating enough dairy foods. Dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yogurt taste great and are good for you too! Dairy foods are packed full of goodness containing at least 10 essential nutrients including:

- protein;
- carbohydrate;
- vitamins (A, B12, and riboflavin); and
- minerals (**calcium**, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium and zinc).

Of all these nutrients, the most important one for teenagers to be aware of is **calcium**. You will have heard that calcium is good for building strong bones. Well at no other time is this more important for you than now. Did you know that during the teenage growth spurt you develop one quarter of your adult bone density? Having enough calcium is critical for making sure your maximum bone density is achieved. Once you are an adult in your twenties, increases in bone density stops and bones gradually start to lose calcium, making them weaker. Weaker bones mean there is greater risk of developing osteoporosis – a condition where bones have lost calcium, become fragile and fracture more easily. The stronger bones become during teenage years, the less chance there will be of developing osteoporosis later in life.

How much calcium every day?

Because calcium is so important in teenage years for bone growth, you need a lot during this time. The Recommended Daily Intake (RDI) for calcium for both boys and girls between the age of 12 to 18 years is 1300mg a day.

So what do you need to eat or drink to get 1300mg of calcium a day? Dairy foods are a rich source of calcium and provide most of the calcium in the Australian diet. Having at least 3 serves of dairy foods every day will provide almost three quarters of your RDI for calcium. One serve of dairy is equal to 1 glass (250ml) milk, 1 tub (200g) yogurt or 2 slices (40g) cheese.

Calcium can also be found in other foods such as fish with bones, leafy green vegetables, nuts such as almonds, cereals and legumes. However you need to eat large amounts to provide the same amount of calcium that is found in one serve of dairy foods.

Some other drinks such as certain varieties of soy or rice drinks have calcium added to them. Be aware though that these drinks may be low in many of the other important nutrients found naturally in cow's milk. Similarly, calcium supplements won't provide the energy, protein and other vitamins and minerals found in dairy food.

To see how your calcium intake rates, check out the calcium calculator at www.dairyaustralia.com.au/calcium

I thought dairy foods were fattening?

Dairy foods are not fattening as part of a healthy balanced diet. In fact regular fat milk contains only 3.8% fat. And while all dairy foods can fit into a balanced diet, there is also a wide range of reduced or low fat dairy foods. For example milk (both white and flavoured) comes in many reduced fat varieties which have only around 1.0% fat.

The good news is that dairy foods may also help you manage your weight. Research has shown that people who have low calcium and/or dairy intakes are more likely to have a greater amount of body fat, and a greater risk of gaining weight and more fat over time. In addition, if you are trying to lose weight and you normally have a low intake of dairy foods, it has been shown that including 3 serves of dairy in a calorie controlled eating plan may help you achieve a slightly greater weight loss.

I have a problem with acne. Should I avoid dairy foods?

No! This is a common myth. Research has shown that dairy food intake does not cause acne. Expert dermatologists state that acne is not caused by diet but rather other factors such as skin type, genetics, hormones, and exposure to environmental pollutants are more likely to be involved.

Eating a healthy balanced diet including plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables, wholegrain breads and cereals, lean meats and low-fat dairy foods will ensure your skin gets all the nutrients it needs and will help in the management of acne.

Getting your 3 serves plus

Getting at least 3 serves of dairy every day is easy. Here are some quick simple ideas.

- Top your cereal and milk with fruit flavoured yogurt.
- Try dipping a cereal bar into fruit yogurt.
- Every time you have pasta, try to top it off with shaved or grated parmesan or mozzarella cheese.
- Aim to include cheese in most of your sandwiches.
- Snuggle up with warm milk or hot chocolate before bed.
- For an energizing fruit smoothie throw together some fruit, yogurt and milk.

You can also log onto www.dairyaustralia.com.au/recipes for some more tasty dairy ideas.

