

HOW TO CHOOSE Healthy Foods

Which brand of cereal should your teenager pick out at the store? At a restaurant, what can she order that doesn't contain an entire day's worth of calories? And how could she find something nutritious when a vending machine is her only option?

With these tips, your child will discover how to evaluate foods and choose healthier ones whether she's with you or out on her own.



Stocking up

Eating well at home begins with buying nutritious foods. Take your teen grocery shopping, and show her how you make good decisions. She'll not only have healthy foods for meals and snacks, she'll also begin learning to be a smart shopper.

Before: Let your teen help you write a grocery list. Suggest that you both eat a nutritious snack at home so you're not hungry while shopping. These strategies will make you more likely to buy what you need—and avoid impulse purchases like cookies or a gallon of ice cream.

During: Look for fresh, healthy choices, such as fruits and vegetables, fat-free or low-fat dairy products, and lean meats.

For packaged foods, recommend that your child scan labels to find the best options. For example, the amount of sodium in jarred pasta sauce varies widely—have her pick a jar with less. Ditto for the sugar content in cereals.

After: As the two of you put groceries away, place the healthiest items front and center in the pantry and refrigerator.

Idea: Your tween could slice onions, peppers, mushrooms, and carrots, and put them into zipper bags to make “vegetable packs” for snacking or stir-fries. And she might arrange fresh fruit in a bowl on the counter for easy access.



Too good to be true?

Encourage your teen to be mindful of these grocery items that sound nutritious—but may not be.

Multigrain bread. The word *multigrain* simply means that different grains are included. They're not necessarily *whole* grains—some could be *refined*, or stripped of most of their nutrients. Have your child look for breads labeled “100% whole grain” or “100% whole wheat.”

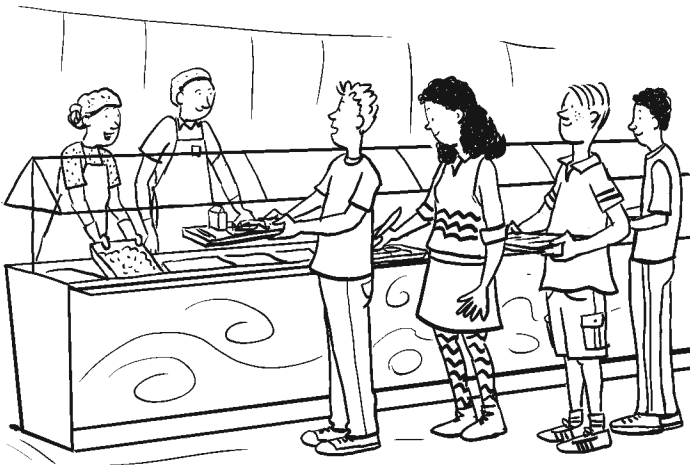
Fat-free salad dressings. All too often, these dressings use lots of salt and sugar to replace the flavor from fat. Teach your tween to opt for regular salad dressings with healthy fats from olive oil and avocado. In addition to keeping him full longer, these fats help his body absorb nutrients from salad greens and other vegetables.



Yogurt-covered snacks. Most “yogurt-covered” nuts, raisins, or pretzels contain very little actual yogurt. Instead, your teenager might top plain Greek yogurt with raisins. Or he could roll grapes in Greek yogurt, sprinkle with chopped nuts, and freeze for a sweet and crunchy snack.

Energy bars. Does your tween know that his favorite protein bar may contain more sugar than a typical candy bar? Suggest that he choose bars with less than 8 grams of sugar per serving and that have short, simple ingredient lists. Better yet, he can refuel with a banana and a glass of fat-free milk.

Eating away from home



Lunch in school, dinner out with friends, snacks at the movies...regardless of when and where your teenager eats, he can find his best bets with these strategies.

The school cafeteria

School breakfast and lunch play important roles in maintaining an overall healthy diet. Have your teenager read the cafeteria menu at the start of each week. Thinking ahead of time about what he might buy may lead to better decisions. *Tip:* Remind your child to actually *eat* lunch in school—since students sometimes let studying or socializing get in the way of a midday meal. Point out that lunch will help him do his best in afternoon classes and at after-school practices and activities.

Restaurants

Suggest that your tween look at the menu online before she heads out. Seeing the calorie count on the General Tso's chicken or the bacon double-cheeseburger may be enough to

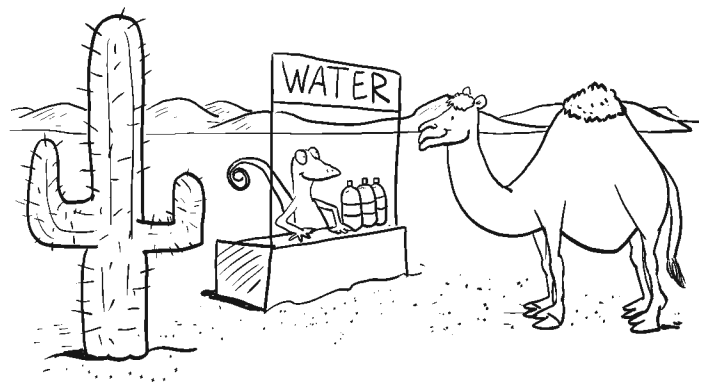
steer her toward a healthier choice. To keep things in check, she might split an entree or a sandwich with a friend. Or she could up the nutrition by ordering brown rice instead of white or a small salad in place of french fries. If the website has a nutrition calculator, encourage her to experiment with different toppings and sauces to make dishes better for her. Sometimes a simple adjustment, like swapping mustard for mayo or getting sauce on the side, can make a big difference. Say $\frac{1}{4}$ of the calories in a burrito bowl come from the sour cream it's smothered in—maybe she'll request it on the side and drizzle on a small amount.

Vending machines

Share this tidbit with your teenager: Look “high and low” when selecting a vending-machine snack. Usually, more nutritious items are in the top and bottom rows (with the chips and candy bars at eye level). He may find snacks like plain popcorn, sunflower seeds, and trail mix in the “good” rows.

Parties

If your child is invited to a party, encourage her to ask the host if she can bring a dish to share. She'll have fun researching “healthy party appetizers” on Pinterest—and she'll be guaranteed at least one nutritious treat to munch on. Perhaps she'll make a seven-layer veggie dip or corn-and-black-bean salsa—or draw on ideas she finds to invent her own recipe. And when your tween hosts a party, offer to help her plan a healthy menu.



Concession stands

At a ballpark, pool, fair, or movie theater, your teenager may be tempted by hot dogs or cotton candy. Remind him that while an occasional treat is okay, other options are usually available at concession stands these days. He could skip the candy bar and look for a turkey wrap, baked chips, or fresh fruit. He should also avoid soda—water is a better drink choice.



Editor's Note: Teen Food & Fitness™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.