

Healthy eating for teenagers

It can be hard to change a bad eating habit. Start by working on the small things that are easier to change.

Don't skip meals – eating regularly can help you eat less overall and avoid the urge for junk food.

Breakfast

Have a good breakfast every day. Good breakfast choices include: whole-grain cereals, such as Weet-Bix™ or porridge, whole-grain toast, eggs, fruit and low-fat milk (green or yellow top) and low-fat, low-sugar yoghurt.

Lunch

Make your lunch, and leave your wallet at home. This will help you stop buying unhealthy junk food at school or on the way there – plus it will save you money.

If you are buying your lunch:

- choose something healthy, like, a whole-grain sandwich or roll, wrap, sushi, falafel, boiled egg, soup, small can of fish and fresh fruit
- don't go for fried foods, pies and other pastries, cakes, biscuits, sweet muffins and snack foods like sweets, chocolate and chippies. If you are tempted – go for a smaller portion size or share with a friend.

Snacks

Choose healthier options for snacks, such as fruit, low-fat, low-sugar yoghurt, homemade popcorn, nuts and hummus with crackers or vegetable sticks.

Don't be fooled in to thinking that all snack bars are healthy. Many can be high in sugar and fat. Think of them as special treats. And when you are looking to buy one, study the nutrition labels on the back of the packet and look for the bar with the lowest sugar and fat content per 100 g, or the best Health Star rating (the most stars).

Fuel up on vegetables and fruit – aim to eat vegetables at least three times a day and fruit

at least two times a day. It's easy if you include them in each meal and in your snacks.

Dinner

Eat a meal prepared at home before going out with your mates so that you're not tempted to waste lots of money on junk food.

Have a go at cooking for yourself and your whānau – they'll love it, and you'll learn some great skills for when you leave home.

Watching TV while eating dinner can increase the amount you eat. Switch off the TV, your computer, tablet and cell phone while you're eating dinner so you aren't distracted.

Eat meals together as a family or household as much as possible.

Drink tap water or low-fat milk rather than soft drinks, energy drinks, cordials or sports drinks (even after you've been running around the sports field or killing it at the gym, water is still best). Even 100 percent fruit juice has a lot of sugar in it.

Avoid alcohol. There are lots of good reasons to avoid alcohol – the main one is that it is just not that healthy for you.

Think before you buy. Ask yourself, are you really hungry, or are you actually thirsty, tired, bored, feeling a bit down or stressed, or are you just buying it because your friends are?

Avoid fad diets – anything that suggests you cut a whole food group/type (eg, carbohydrates, fat) from your diet is most likely to be a fad diet. Those diets are often not nutritionally balanced. This means that you could miss out on important vitamins and minerals that your body needs.

