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Teenage Nutrition

In general, nutrition requirements for teenagers are fairly similar to the guidelines laid out for adults in the **Eat Well Guide**. This means aiming for a varied and balanced diet including all food groups and matching the proportions to those explained in the Eat Well guide.

- Aiming for at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day
- 6-8 glasses of water a day—milk and sugar-free squash are also great choices.
- Foods high in sugar and fat should be had in smaller amounts and less often (but they still have a place!)

IRON

Teenage growth means the need for iron increases slightly. Boys aged 11-18 need 11.3mg/day whereas girls need 14.8mg. This difference is due to iron losses during periods. If periods are particularly heavy, they may need more iron than this.

Food Sources: Meat (especially red meat), dark leafy green veggies, beans, nuts and dried fruit (apricots in particular). Cereals and flours that have been fortified. Vitamin C can increase iron absorption so having a glass of orange juice or some veggies with vitamin C in (e.g. tomatoes) alongside a meal can help. Tea and coffee reduce absorption so it's best to save those for in between meals.

100g Minced Beef: 2.7mg | 3-4 Apricots: 1mg | 1/2 Can Baked Beans: 2.9mg | 100g Broccoli: 1mg

CALCIUM

The rapid growth occurring in adolescence means teenagers need more calcium than adults which helps to encourage optimal bone health in later life. Boys aged 11-18 require 1000mg/day whereas girls need 800mg.

Food Sources: Dairy products! Milk is a great option and the lower-fat versions can provide the same amount of calcium as whole milk. Cheese is also a great choice, harder cheeses like cheddar are a greater source of calcium compared to lower-fat options like cottage cheese. If your teenager prefers plant-based alternatives, just make sure the products are fortified with calcium, such as plant-based milks, yogurts and cereals. Green leafy vegetables such as kale is also a great source of calcium.

30g Cheese: 220mg | 200ml Milk (all types): 240mg | 120g Yoghurt: 200mg | 100g Cooked Kale: 150mg

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VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is also important in keeping teenagers bones and teeth healthy. During lighter months from late March/early April until late September, we can get the vitamin D we need between both food and sunlight. During the months of October to early March, teenagers should be taking a 10 microgram (ug) supplement every day. Vitamin D is absorbed through the skin and is put to use helping to absorb calcium.

DISORDERED EATING

Teenage years include a lot of changes and the changes to their bodies can sometimes make teenagers more vulnerable to fad diets that promise quick weight loss. Disordered eating and eating disorders can develop in both boys and girls so keeping an eye out for the signs is really important. **BEAT UK** are a great resource and if you're concerned you should speak to your GP for further advice and support.

Teenagers should be able to get all the nutrients they need from a varied and balanced diet (other than Vitamin D during darker months). If you have any concerns, please speak to your GP for more advice and before beginning any supplements.

