

Meal ideas for school-aged children, tweens and teens

Reviewed by SickKids Staff | Last updated: April 16th 2020

Learn how to support your child's nutrition needs with nutritious snacks and meal ideas.

Key points

- Offer and encourage your child to enjoy a wide range of nutritious foods.
- Start with breakfast as an essential part of the day so that your child has enough fuel to help them concentrate at school.
- Prepare breakfasts, lunches and snacks with your child the night before.
- Establish good eating habits at dinner time by encouraging the family to eat and talk together.
- Talk about and introduce different meal and snack options with/to your child.



Starting school is a big occasion for you and your child. As they gain independence, this is the time to establish good eating habits. The amount of food your child eats will depend on their activity levels and growth spurts. Their food choices can be influenced by friends and the media, so it's a good idea to talk with your child about the importance of healthy eating.

Breakfast

Children and teens should get into the habit of eating a well-balanced breakfast. This will give

them energy and help them concentrate in school. To make it easier to include breakfast in your child's routine, find the time in the morning to eat breakfast together. Preparing some of the items the night before will help make time for breakfast together the next morning.

Here are some tips for a well-balanced breakfast:

- Serve toast, English muffins or bagels with nut butter, cream cheese, eggs or sliced cheese.
- Defrost frozen fruit the night before and add it to a bowl of warm, quick oatmeal the next morning. You can also combine frozen fruit to oats, yogurt and milk the night before.
- Cook hard boiled eggs the day before so they are ready in the fridge for a fast breakfast.
- Top yogurt with a high fiber cereal, nuts and/or seeds.

Is breakfast really the most important meal of the day?

Go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/BKD6TBH0TUI>

to view this web only media.

For more videos from SickKids experts in collaboration with Youngster, visit [Youngster on YouTube](#).

Lunch

Use the following tips when preparing school lunches:

- Provide small portions of food with plenty of variety if your child often leaves food unfinished.
- Pack lunches that are easy to carry and eat.
- Use leftovers that convert well to lunch-friendly meals.
- Pack lunches the night before so they are easy to grab before leaving the house.
- Use a freezer pack for food that may go bad, and a quality insulated container for hot foods.
- Involve your child in preparing lunches.
- Pay attention to how much lunch your child brings home. Find out if your child is

- interested in foods that their friends may bring to school.
- Share new lunch ideas with your child or teen based on their food preferences or discover new foods together.

Snacks

Children, and teens especially, often have big appetites after school. Have nutritious snack foods available to sustain your child's energy levels between meals, for example, cut-up vegetables with dip or hummus, fruit, cheese and crackers, guacamole and chips, or nut butter and tortilla roll ups. When healthy options are convenient, your child will eat them more often.

Dinner

Dinner is a time for the family to connect and is a great time to engage in these healthy eating habits.

Cooking more often

Cooking at home gives you more control over what you and your family eats, and lets you [teach your children about meal preparation](#). Cooking at home is also more affordable than eating out.

Eating meals with others

Children get a lot of benefit from eating regular family meals, as it allows them to try new foods, develop a healthy eating routine, and explore cultural and traditional foods. Family meals also let the whole family connect and unwind from the day. A 'family meal' can mean sharing a meal with even one other member of your family. Find what works best for your family's schedule.

Being mindful of your eating habits

Being mindful of what you eat means taking the time to notice when you are hungry and when you are full. Limiting screen time during a meal can help with mindful eating.

Enjoying your food

It is important to create an environment where children learn what healthy meals are and are given opportunities to discover which ones they love, like or dislike. Try a wide variety of foods and include your family's traditional or cultural foods as often as possible.

Developing healthy habits is a family effort

Remember, establishing good eating habits can take time and patience. Don't be discouraged if you are met with some resistance. Try to involve your child when making your shopping list, going food shopping and preparing meals. Make it fun and not a chore. Try a wide variety of different foods and enjoy them together.

Please visit [AboutKidsHealth.ca](https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca) for more child health information.

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