

# How to Support Healthy Food Choices for Your Preteen

Preteen years are a crucial time during your child's growth, when nutrition needs increase. According to Lindsay Yau, MS, Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, Sharp Rees-Stealy Center for Health Management, the average child grows 20 percent taller and 50 percent heavier during the teenage growth spurt. "Healthy eating during this time determines how strong and fit the body will grow," she says. Yau offers the following advice for parents to help support healthy food choices for their child.

## What You Can Do

**1) Make healthy snacks easy and accessible.** If it's there your child will eat it.

- Cut up fresh fruit (try sliced apples, berries, or grapes) and store in single servings, ready to go
- Hummus and carrots vs. chips and dips
- Whole wheat crackers and peanut butter
- Portable fruit such as an apple or banana paired with string cheese or low-fat plain yogurt

**2) Be a role model.** Make sure to fill your own meal with fruits and vegetables. When your child sees you eating a variety of fruits and vegetables and enjoying it, they'll be more likely to do the same.

**3) Let your child be a part of preparing meals.** Have your child choose what fruits or vegetables they would like for their lunch or dinner; take them to the grocery store with you and if interested, have them help with meal prep. This will encourage them to try new foods and feel a sense of responsibility.

**4) Encourage variety.** Variety is important in ensuring your child gets all the nutrients he/she needs. Make sure to encourage different types of fruits, vegetables, proteins, and whole grains when planning your meals and snacks.

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