

7 Essential Nutrients For Teens

#1 Carbohydrates

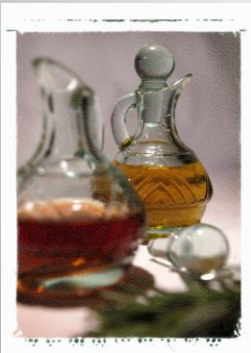
All carbohydrates are our main fuel source for all functions. Especially our brain and muscles - they will not function properly without carbs provided through our food. At least half (50%) of your total daily calories should come from carbohydrate choices. The best type of carbs are from whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and low-fat dairy items whereas we should limit processed sugars, sodas, candy, pastries to a few items per week. If you try to follow a low-carb diet your brain and muscles won't be able to keep up!



#2 Protein

Protein is a building block for all cellular structures. It provides some calories but its main jobs include the building, repair, and maintenance of our skin, muscles, organs, blood, and even bones. Growth and development during teen years makes this a vital nutrient. Since it is not an efficient fuel source we should only be getting about 15% of our daily calories from protein sources. Animal sources of protein are more available for our body than plant sources. Animal sources include beef, poultry, fish, eggs and dairy products. Plant sources include beans, nuts/seeds, and soy based products. Would consuming too much protein be harmful? Well, since all extra calories are stored as body fat - consuming excessive protein would not be beneficial in order to maintain our overall health and wellness. So, follow the old saying "More isn't always better".

#3 Fats



Dietary fats are not the same as body fat. The nutrient from our food provides cellular structure, hormones, as well as a medium for fat-soluble vitamins. Only extra calories that are not used turn into body fat within our bodies! We should keep our daily total of dietary fats between 25-30% for dietary fats. This level will provide the needed nutrients but keep away the excess. We should focus on getting our fats from sources such as nuts/seeds, nut butters, olive oil, fish/seafood. Limiting those "unhealthy" fats in processed foods, baked goods to no more than a couple times per week would be a smart idea.

#4 Calcium

Calcium is a major mineral that is needed for growth and development of our bones and teeth. Because you experience nearly half of all your skeletal growth during your teen years this makes it a very essential time for calcium consumption. Calcium is provided naturally by dairy products And some vegetables as well as being "fortified" in other products like OJ, cereals, soy milk, and tofu. Try to get at least 1,200 to 1,500mg per day for keeping your body healthy.



#5 Iron

Iron is a very important nutrient for all teens however, girls and guys need it for different reasons. During adolescence males have larger growth spurts and gains of muscle mass. Adequate iron is needed to help support growths in blood volume that accompany this muscle growth. Where as, females will need some extra iron to replace blood losses during menstrual cycles. There is a need for about 15mg of iron each day. In food we can get iron from red meats, fortified grains and cereals, as well as some dried fruits like raisins as well as some of our vegetables like spinach.

#6 Zinc

This is a very important mineral since its main role is in keeping our immune system healthy. The best sources for zinc in our diet include seafood, meats, beans, and peanuts. The animal sources are the most highly absorbed. Zinc supplementation within a multivitamin-mineral is typically safe however there is the possibility of toxicity with over-supplementation. Make sure your supplementation does not exceed 40mg per day. One source of over-supplementation to consider is sore-throat lozenges which contain zinc.

#7 B-complex

This complex of multiple vitamins is vital for our bodies energy processes which we also know as our metabolism. Energy demands are high for teens and we need the whole complex of B's every day to achieve positive energy balance. The complex includes: B1(thiamin), B2 (riboflavin), B3 (niacin), and folate. Other B's include B6 and B12. The B's are most abundant in whole grains, rice, nuts, dairy, eggs, meats, fish, fruits, and leafy greens.. Variety of food choices is very essential to reach the variety of B's needed during each and every day!



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