Middle School Guidance Officer Report

It's normal for children's eating habits to change in puberty. Older children and teenagers need to eat more, and they often like to experiment with food and eating – but they don't always make healthy choices. This is a time to support your teen with healthy eating habits to last for the rest of their life.

Eating habits in teenagers

As teenagers grow and develop, it's **normal for them to start eating a lot more**. Your child's body is going through a major growth spurt and extra food provides extra energy and nutrients to support this.

Your child might also **start changing their eating habits**. For example, it's common for teenagers to start eating fewer fruit and vegies and more fatty and sugary foods. There might be lots of reasons for this. It could be because your child's friends are into convenience or junk foods, because they have their own money to spend on food, or because they want to test your family values about eating.

When teenagers eat a wide range of foods from the five food groups, they get the nutrition they need for health, growth and development.

What is healthy food for older children and teenagers?

Healthy food for pre-teen and teenage children includes a wide variety of fresh foods from the **five food groups**:

- vegetables
- fruit
- grain foods – bread, pasta, breakfast cereals, rice, corn and so on
- reduced-fat dairy – milk, cheese, yoghurt and so on – or dairy-free alternatives
- protein – meat, fish, chicken, eggs, beans, lentils, chickpeas, nuts, tofu and so on.

It's important for your child to eat a range of foods from across all five food groups. This gives your child all the extra nutrition and energy they need to grow and develop properly.

Helping your child with healthy eating habits

Role-modelling

Being a positive food role model is one of the best ways to reinforce your child's healthy eating habits.

This is about showing your child that healthy eating is important to you. There are lots of ways you can do this – for example, by always eating breakfast and by choosing healthy food options when you're eating away from home or food shopping.

Making time to enjoy healthy meals as a family is one of the best ways to model healthy habits and increase your child's interest in food and nutrition. It's also a good way to spend family time together catching up on everyone's day.

Creating a healthy food environment

If you have a healthy food environment in your family, it makes it easier for your child to make better choices.

Here are some practical ways you can create a healthy food environment:

- Ask your child to help with your family's food shopping and meal planning.

- Encourage your child to take responsibility for planning and preparing one healthy family meal a week.

- Limit unhealthy food options in your home, and make it easy for your child to find healthy food at home. For example, keep a bowl of fruit on the bench, a container of chopped vegies in the fridge, a loaf of wholegrain bread in the freezer, and a bag of wholegrain crackers in the cupboard.

- If your child starts learning to cook some simple healthy meals now, it sets them up to make better food choices in the future. Also, if your child feels they have some say about what's on the menu, they are more likely to eat it.

Anna Willis
Middle School Guidance Officer