Because of their poor diet choices, teens are at risk for becoming deficient in some essential nutrients. Calcium is a nutrient that is lacking in many teen’s diets. Teens need around 1300 mg of calcium each day, which is the equivalent of around four cups of milk or yogurt. Teens can also be at risk for becoming deficient in iron, especially teen girls. Good sources of iron include meats, dark green leafy vegetables, and dried fruit.

Another concern regarding the diet of today’s teens is the increasing rates of obesity in children and teens. According to the CDC, in the past 30 years, the obesity rate in teens ages 12-19 tripled. In 1980, 5 percent of the teen population was affected by childhood obesity. This number increased to 18 percent in 2010. With these frightening statistics, it’s time to take a look at teens’ diets. The habits and choices that start in the teenage years can carry over into adulthood. By making changes to kid’s diets early on, a lifetime of good habits can form.

“According to the CDC, in the past 30 years, the obesity rate in teens ages 12-19 tripled.”

Do you eat three meals per day?

Three meals per day are three opportunities to get in good nutrition. When teens skip meals they miss out on these nutrients. Also, as teens skip meals, they typically end up getting overly hungry later and grab high calorie snack foods.

IF YOU SAID NO...

Try to have quick meal options available that are ready to go. Breakfast is frequently skipped, so fill your fridge with low-fat string cheese, fresh fruit, and boiled eggs. Chop-up fresh veggies and toppings for your teen to make a quick salad for a quick dinner before practice. Don’t forget to top it with protein such as chicken, cheese or eggs!

Teens’ diets can be filled with high calorie processed foods, and many lack fresh vegetables and fruit. Skipping these foods can cause your diet to lack vitamins, minerals and fiber! A quick way to determine how much you need is by filling half of your plate with fruit or vegetables for each meal. This “Choose My Plate” model (pictured left) is developed by the USDA and is very easy to remember.
**IF YOU SAID NO...**
There are many fruits and vegetables that can be added to your teen’s diet. Add diced vegetables to an omelet, top sandwiches with fresh veggies, mix yogurt and fruit together, make a fruit smoothie, or make a tasty dip for a fruit or vegetable.

**YES  NO  DO YOU MOSTLY DRINK WATER?**
High calorie sodas and drinks add up so quickly. Frozen drinks and milkshakes can add more than 500 calories at a time. Other juices, flavored drinks and sodas also add many extra calories. Water is always the best choice to stay hydrated. Aim for 8 glasses a day, more if you are exercising.

**IF YOU SAID NO...**
Offer water at meals and snacks. Flavor it with a slice of fresh lemon, lime or even cucumber to add variety.

**YES  NO  DO YOU HAVE A DIET FULL OF LOW-FAT DAIRY FOODS, SUCH AS MILK, YOGURT, AND CHEESE?**
Teens need 1,300 mg of calcium every day. This can be tough to meet for some teens. An 8 oz. glass of milk, yogurt or a serving of cheese all have around 300 mg of calcium. Calcium is very important in the teen years as strong bones are forming.

**IF YOU SAID NO...**
Begin adding calcium to your diet in fun ways. Serve smoothies for snacks. Melt low-fat cheese on eggs or sandwiches or top yogurt with granola for a healthy snack.

**YES  NO  DO YOUチョイスWHOLE GRAINS?**
It’s time to replace white pasta, white bread and white rice with healthy whole grains full of fiber and great nutrition.

**IF YOU SAID NO...**
Begin swapping your white flour products for whole grains. These complex carbohydrates are full of fiber, vitamins and minerals and are nutritionally superior to white flour products. Make the switch today!

**YES  NO  DO YOU CHOOSE IRON-RICH FOODS?**
Teenage boys need approximately 11 mg of iron daily and teenage girls need approximately 15 mg. Foods high in iron include red meats, egg yolks, dark green leafy vegetables, and enriched cereals. Taking an iron-rich food with a food high in Vitamin C can increase absorption. For example, have a bowl of raisin bran with a glass of juice in the morning!

**IF YOU SAID NO...**
It’s not too late; begin adding iron-rich foods today.

**YES  NO  ARE YOU ACTIVE MOST DAYS?**
Balancing healthy nutrition with movement can promote a healthy weight and can start teens on the road for lifetime wellness. It’s also a great way to reduce stress in your teen’s life.

**IF YOU SAID NO...**
Find activities your teen may enjoy. Join an intramural sport or activity. Make it a family affair. Take a family bike ride or walk and get healthy together.
Practice Moderation
Not every day is perfect, so if you have a day where you eat high-calorie, high-fat options, balance it out by choosing healthy options the next meal. No one is perfect and no one has a perfect diet. Everyone will splurge once in a while; just make sure your diet is balanced most of the time.

Get Moving Together
Family bike rides, a walk with mom or a hike in the woods are great ways to increase your activity.

Conclusion
The teenage years are a great time to begin a lifetime of healthy habits. Start slowly by making a few changes at a time. You’ll be amazed how quickly you’ll see progress!

About the Author:
Sarah Muntel, RD, is the bariatric coordinator with Community Health Network in Indianapolis. She has worked in the field of bariatrics for the past 15 years and enjoys helping people get to a healthy weight so they can improve their health, feel better about themselves and become more active.

Motivation is Key
Now you know what to eat, how do you lead your teen in the right direction? Below, you will find some ways to motivate your teen:

Lead By Example
You’ll be amazed with what happens when you start leading the way. Your whole family can begin eating healthy together.

Modify Some of Their Favorite “Junk Foods”
Talk with your teen about their favorite foods and find ways to make them healthier. For example, make healthy chicken nuggets by dipping chicken in egg and coating in a high-fiber cereal or make a frozen coffee drink with skim milk and low-sugar syrup.

Talk About Making the Best Choice
You’re not going to be with your teen all the time. Educate your teen on good choices to make on their own. You can make it fun. Find different places they typically go and find the best choice. Teens will eat fast food but knowing the grilled chicken sandwich is the best choice is a good start. Discuss movie theatre choices and show them how many calories are added when you put butter on your popcorn. Teens will be amazed!
OAC Membership Categories
(select one)
- Individual Membership: $20/year
- Institutional Membership: $500/year
- Chairman’s Council Membership: $1,000+/year

OAC Membership Add-ons
(optional, but only accessible by OAC members)

Add-on 1: Educational Resources
To order bulk copies of OAC resources, members can purchase educational packages. If you’d like to order resources, select one of the below packages.
- Standard Package
  10-50 pieces/quarter $50/year
- Deluxe Package
  51-100 pieces/quarter $100/year
- Premium Package
  101-250 pieces/quarter $150/year

Add-on 2: Make a General Donation
Make a tax-deductible donation to the OAC when joining as a member. Your donation helps the OAC’s educational and advocacy efforts.
- $5
- $10
- $25
- $50
- $100
- Other

Membership/Add-on Totals:
Membership Category: $_____
Add-on 1 (if applicable): +$_____
Add-on 2 (if applicable): +$_____
TOTAL MEMBERSHIP PAYMENT: $_____

Contact Information
Name: ____________________________
Address: ____________________________
City: __________________ State: _____ Zip: ____________
Phone: _______________ Email: ____________

Payment Information
- Check (payable to the OAC) for $_____
- Credit card for my TOTAL membership fee of $_____
  - Discover®
  - Visa®
  - MasterCard®
  - Amex®
Credit Card Number: ____________________________
Expiration Date: ___________ Billing Zip Code: ________

Building a Coalition of those Affected
The OAC is the ONLY non-profit organization whose sole focus is helping those affected by obesity. The OAC is a great place to turn if you are looking for a way to get involved and give back to the cause of obesity.

There are a variety of ways that you can make a difference, but the first step is to become an OAC Member. The great thing about OAC membership is that you can be as involved as you would like. Simply being a member contributes to the cause of obesity.

Why YOU Should Become an OAC Member
Quite simply, because the voice of those affected needs to be built! The OAC not only provides valuable public education on obesity, but we also conduct a variety of advocacy efforts. With advocacy, our voice must be strong. And, membership is what gives the OAC its strong voice.

Benefits to Individual Membership
- Official welcome letter and membership card
- Annual subscription to the OAC’s publication, Your Weight Matters Magazine
- Subscriptions to the OAC Members Make a Difference and Obesity Action Alert monthly e-newsletters
- “Bias Buster” Alerts, alerting specifically to issues of weight bias
- Immediate Advocacy Alerts on urgent advocacy issues and access to the OAC’s expert advocacy team
- Ability to lend your voice to the cause