



Healthy Eating in Stressful Times: Tips for Families with Teens

Stress can disrupt our eating habits. With uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, it's not surprising that unhealthy habits are sneaking in for teens and adults alike! If your family has turned to increased snacking or meals in front of the TV, you're not alone.

There are many reasons to eat well. It can improve your mood, help balance energy levels, and help to prevent chronic disease. Keep in mind that there is no single nutrient, vitamin, mineral, or natural health product to fight against COVID-19. An overall healthy diet supports your immune system.

Here are some tips to help your teen and family make healthy eating a priority during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stick with a schedule. Having regular meal and snack times adds a sense of rhythm to your teen's day. This goes along with a regular sleep and wake schedule. Eating regularly fuels your body and helps to keep you from reaching for extra snacks during times of stress or boredom. Encourage your teen to set (and stick with) a meal schedule that works for them.

Healthy Teens

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Eat together. Meals can be a shared experience and a great time to get together, catch up, and communicate. Even if your family has a busy schedule, try to eat meals together a few times a week. There's no need to be fancy—a sandwich and a fruit can be a quick and healthy meal.

When eating as a family, try to limit technology at the table, like phones, tablets, and TV. Instead, try [conversation cards](#) or listen to music.

Let them lead. Teens are able to do so much in the kitchen! They can follow recipes, be involved in grocery shopping, and even make the family meals themselves. Involving your teen in cooking can help increase their interest in food, boost self-confidence, and build important food skills.

If your teen is new to cooking, try the following tips to give them a healthy start:

- Start small. Recipes with few ingredients or steps can be simple and fun!
- Encourage your teen to find a recipe they would like to try, such as those on [UnlockFood.ca/recipes](https://unlockfood.ca/recipes) or the [Cookspiration.com](https://cookspiration.com) website or recipe app.
- Let your teen choose! Have one family meal a week where they are in charge.

Model healthy behaviors. Lead by example! Model healthy habits that your teen will carry with them for life. Show them how you plan family meals, make [healthy grocery lists](#), and use up leftovers in the fridge.

Talk about your value systems. Your family's eating habits may reflect the values you share. Talk with your teen about what's important to them, and help them explore how values influence their food and drink choices. For example, if active living is a priority, you might focus on eating well to fuel your physically active way of life.

Connect culture. Find a family or cultural recipe and make it together. Explain the history and meaning behind the recipe. This can help build cultural connections and a sense of belonging.

All families are different! Focus on what works best for you and your family.

These recipes can help your teen get comfortable in the kitchen.

- [Breakfast Burrito](#)
- [Orzo Salad](#)
- [Turkey Shepherd's Pie](#)
- [Banana and Carrot Bread](#)

For more ideas, visit HealthyEatingStartsHere.ca