

## A Healthy Relationship with Food: What it Means for your Teen

Food is part of our everyday lives. Each person has their own way of approaching it. We all have a unique relationship with food - how we think about it, talk about it, and enjoy it.

As a parent or caregiver, you play an important role in shaping your teen's relationship with food. Your words and actions influence their growth, social well-being, and mental health.

Teens who have a healthy relationship with food can:

- Eat without fear, shame, or guilt.
- Enjoy and appreciate eating with others.
- Trust that their body knows how much and what to eat.
- Give themselves permission to eat any foods they like.
- Understand that food is just one part of their life and does not need to take up all their time and attention.

Here's how you can help your teen build a healthy relationship with food.

### Use Neutral Language

As a family, use neutral words and phrases when you talk about food.

- Try not to label food as “good” or “bad” or use terms like “clean eating” or “junk food”. Instead, call food by its name (e.g., calling a cookie a cookie, not a “treat” or “unhealthy food”).



- Use sensory words (e.g., “fresh”, “spicy”, or “crunchy”) that describe a food’s smell, flavour, texture, colour, or shape. Try not to use words like “gross”, “yuck”, or “disgusting” when talking about food.
- Don’t talk about using food to change weight or body size. Instead, show your teen that by eating a variety of food, we can help our minds and bodies feel good.

### Explore and Enjoy Food

Encourage your teen to eat and enjoy foods that they like, that make them feel full and satisfied, and that help their mind and body feel good.

These tips can help:

- Welcome all types of food into your home. Unless there are allergies, medical conditions, or cultural food restrictions, all food can be enjoyed.

- Share and create food traditions with your teen. Teach them how to make recipes that are part of your family or culture or make new recipes together.
- Encourage your teen to try new food and eating experiences. Embrace their curiosity! Let them help buy, prepare, or sample food that's new to them.
- Learn together about how food connects to the land. Listen to stories about traditional ways to grow, harvest, fish, hunt, and prepare food.
- Allow your teen to decide when they're hungry or full. If you are concerned about changes in your teen's eating habits, visit [nedic.ca](http://nedic.ca) for support.
- Use mealtimes to connect and relax together. Turn off TVs and set aside phones so you can have conversations.

### Set an Example

Be mindful that how you handle topics like food, eating, and bodies can impact your teen. Reflect on your beliefs and biases and how these affect your relationship with food and your body.

Here are some ways you can model a healthy relationship with food and bodies:

- Try to eat a variety of foods that you like and listen to your body's hunger and fullness cues when you can.
- Take care of your body the way it is right now, without trying to change it. Eat regularly, move in ways you enjoy, and make time for sleep. Help your teen to do the same.
- Don't talk about body size or appearance. Instead, speak up about qualities you admire in your teen and others - like kindness, strength, generosity, and courage.

### Understand Mealtime Roles

Talk with your teen about the role each person plays in family mealtimes. Typically:

- **Adults** decide what food is offered, and when and where it's eaten.
- **Kids and teens** decide how much and if they'll eat the food that's offered.

As your teen grows, build their skills and confidence to take on more of the adult roles. Ask them about their ideas for groceries to buy or meals to make. Put them in charge of packing school lunches or making a family dinner. Have fun with their ideas.

### Support Positive Mealtimes

Make time for family meals. Eat together as much as you can, whether it's breakfast, lunch, dinner, or a snack.

Try these tips to create a positive eating experience:

- Try not to comment on what your teen is eating (or not eating).

### Having trouble paying for food or accessing enough food for your family?

These resources may help:

- Belleville CHAMPS Network: <https://wealldeservetoeat.ca/where-to-find-food/>
- Click or call [211](tel:211)

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