

Nutrients Your Child Needs: Calcium, Iron, Fibre

Helping your child make healthy food choices is a delicate balancing act - you have to consider calories, nutrients, serving sizes, and many other issues, all at the same time. Three important nutrients you need to make sure your child gets in adequate amounts are calcium, iron, and fibre. Keep reading to learn more about the importance of these nutrients to your child's health.

Calcium Counts

It's important that school-age children get adequate amounts of dietary calcium to ensure strong, healthy bones. Children ages 4 to 8 require 800 milligrams of calcium daily, whereas children ages 9 to 18 require 1,300 milligrams daily. You can meet these requirements by offering your children calcium-rich foods.



The preteen and teen years are the time to prevent the bone disease osteoporosis, which involves a reduction in the amount of bone mass. This is true because peak bone mass and calcium content of the skeleton is reached during the teen years.

Calcium is the major mineral that strengthens bones. Bone calcium begins to decrease in young adulthood and progressive loss of bone calcium occurs as we age, particularly in women. Teens, especially girls, whose diets don't provide the nutrients to build bones to maximum potential are at greater risk for developing weakened bones and having disabling injuries later in life.

Children older than 10 years should get 1,300 milligrams of calcium each day. In order to meet that requirement, try the following tips.

Provide low-fat and non-fat versions of dairy favourites, such as cheeses, yogurt, and milk.

Encourage your teen to eat dairy foods, because teens tend to drink less milk than younger children do. Explain that these foods provide the highest-quality calcium in a form the body can absorb quickly.

Encourage your teen to choose low-fat or non-fat milk instead of sodas and sugary fruit drinks that contain very little or no nutrition.

Talk to your daughter about osteoporosis and the importance of dairy products in a healthy diet. Girls often begin to diet at this age and forgo dairy foods they think will make them fat. Offer low-fat and non-fat dairy products as a healthy alternative.

Act as a role model and consume dairy products - you could probably use the calcium too!

Some people lack the intestinal enzyme (lactase) that helps digest the sugar (lactose) in dairy products. People with this problem, called lactose intolerance, may have cramps or diarrhoea after drinking milk or eating dairy products. Fortunately, there are low-lactose and lactose-free dairy products, as well as lactase drops that can be added to dairy products and tablets that can be taken so that those with lactose intolerance can enjoy dairy products and benefit from the calcium.

Can a dairy-free diet supply enough calcium? There are other sources of calcium, but to get enough calcium in the diet from vegetables only is extremely difficult. Alternative sources of calcium include antacid tablets with calcium or calcium supplements. Discuss the advisability of calcium supplements with your child's doctor if your teen isn't getting enough calcium in her diet.

There are other foods that are sources of calcium, such as calcium-fortified juices, leafy green vegetables, and canned fish with bones (sardines and salmon), that can be added to your teen's diet. Also, don't forget to motivate your child to be involved in physical activities and exercise. If your child is an athlete, weight-bearing exercises such as jogging and walking can also help develop and maintain strong bones.

Calcium-Rich Foods		
Portion Size	Food Item	Calcium
8 ounces/250	calcium-fortified orange	300 milligrams

millilitres	juice	
8 ounces/250 millilitres	non-fat (skim) milk	290 to 300 milligrams
6 ounces/175 millilitres	yogurt	280 milligrams
4 ounces/125 grams	tofu	260 milligrams
3 ounces/85 grams	canned salmon with edible bones	205 milligrams
1 ounce/30 grams	cheese	130 to 200 milligrams
4 ounces/125 grams	cottage cheese	100 milligrams
4 ounces/125 grams	ice cream, frozen yogurt, pudding	90 to 100 milligrams
4 ounces/125 grams	turnip greens	100 milligrams

The Importance of Iron

Iron is another essential nutrient that you should make sure is in your child's diet. Infants need 6 to 10 milligrams of iron, and children need 10 to 15 milligrams each day. After age 10, your child should be getting 15 milligrams of iron each day.



Teen boys need extra iron to support their rapid growth, and teen girls need enough iron to replace what they lose once they begin menstruating. The bleeding during a menstrual period involves loss of red blood cells that contain iron. Iron deficiency can be a problem, particularly for girls who

experience very heavy periods. In fact, many teenage girls are at risk for iron deficiency, even if they have normal periods, because their diets may not contain enough iron to offset the blood loss. Also, teens can lose significant amounts of iron through sweating during intense exercise.

Iron deficiency can lead to fatigue, irritability, headaches, lack of energy, and tingling in the hands and feet. Significant iron deficiency can lead to iron-deficiency anaemia. If your child has any of these symptoms, talk to your child's doctor; he or she may prescribe iron supplements. Never give your child iron supplements without consulting your child's doctor, because an iron overdose can cause serious problems.

Avoid iron deficiency by encouraging your child or teen to eat an iron-rich diet that includes beef, chicken, tuna, and shrimp. Iron in these foods is more easily absorbed by the body than the iron found in plant foods. However, dried beans, nuts, and dried fruits can be used to support an otherwise iron-rich menu. Look to iron-fortified breakfast cereals as another iron boost for your teen; just make sure to purchase whole-grain, low-sugar varieties. The following foods are a few examples of iron-rich foods:

fish and shellfish	fortified cereals	dried fruits
red meats	whole-grains	leafy green vegetables
organ meats (such as liver)	dried beans and peas	blackstrap molasses

Fibre Facts

Fibre is an important nutritional component for your child's health. Dietary fibre may play a role in reducing the chances of heart disease and cancer later in life, and fibre helps promote bowel regularity. If you follow the suggestions for fruit and vegetable servings each day and encourage your child to eat whole-grain breads and cereals, you'll be well on the way toward ensuring that your child gets enough fibre.

To determine how many grams of fibre your child should be consuming each day, it is recommended that you add 5 to your child's age in years. You can boost fibre intake by serving fresh salad with meals, adding oat or wheat bran to any baked goods you make, and offering legumes such as chickpeas, lentils, and kidney beans at least once a week.

If you are increasing fibre intake, you should do so gradually because excessive fibre can cause bloating and gas. Don't forget to have your child drink plenty of water each day, since liquid intake can help reduce the chance of fibre-related intestinal distress. Be aware that excessive fibre intake can interfere with the body's absorption of crucial vitamins and minerals.