

Better Eating on the Go



With tweens' and teens' busy schedules, it's no wonder they sometimes eat their meals and snacks on the go. But just because they're grabbing something quick doesn't mean the food can't be healthy, too. Review these tips with your children for finding nutritious foods in a hurry. Plus, they can make their own "fast food" at home using the handy ideas included.

What to order

Today's fast food restaurants offer at least some nutritious choices. Here are ways to pick the best options.



Do your homework

Encourage your teen to look over fast food nutrition facts online or at the restaurant. Work together to plan healthy meals based on what he learns. He can write down his order to carry in his wallet or make a note in his phone so he'll remember what to get.

Drink water

Calories, sugar, and fat will add up fast if your tween orders a soda or shake with her meal. For example, a 16-oz. "small" soda has about 140 calories and 35 grams of sugar. And shakes easily top 500 calories and 15 grams or more of fat. *Tip:* Remind your child that water is healthier and cheaper (as in free—just ask the server for a cup of water).

Watch portions

Recommend that your teen avoid supersizing or buying a combo meal. Instead, he can order food items individually so he gets exactly what he wants—but in reasonable portion sizes and without extra calories.

Eat slowly

Even though the food might come out fast, your child should take her time eating. You can explain that if she eats

quickly, it's more difficult to pay attention to when she feels full. *Hint:* Suggest that she completely chew and swallow each bite before taking another.

Skip the salt shaker

Fast food is already known for being heavy on salt—encourage your tween not to add any more! Staying away from salty french fries and processed meat (ham, sausage) is another way to cut down on sodium. *Tip:* Sodium intake should not exceed 2,300 mg per day.

Watch dessert choices

If your child is in the mood for something sweet, recommend that she stick with fruit (apple slices, banana), a small ice cream rather than a sundae, or frozen yogurt with berries instead of candy on top. All of those are better choices than apple pie or cookies.

Smart snacks at convenience stores

Kids often make a quick stop for food at convenience stores. Help your teen bypass the candy and chips by suggesting more nutritious snacks like these:

- Low-fat string cheese
- Trail mix (individual portion)
- Fat-free yogurt
- Fresh fruit
- Unsalted nuts
- Whole-grain cereal (with less than 5 grams of sugar)
- Fresh vegetables with low-fat dip
- Raisins
- Frozen 100% fruit bars



continued



Restaurant by restaurant

Share this guide to help your child make smart choices in all different types of fast food places.

Burger

- Watch the toppings. Popular additions like bacon or fried onions have plenty of fat and almost no nutritional value. Consider leaving the cheese off, too. Lettuce, tomato, sliced avocado, or other fresh fruits and vegetables, however, make excellent toppings!
- Be picky about sauces. Choose ketchup or mustard instead of high-fat mayonnaise or “special sauce.”

Chicken

- Go for grilled. Fried chicken is coated in breading before being bathed in oil, turning it into a fatty, high-calorie meal. Better options are a grilled chicken wrap or grilled nuggets (go easy on, or skip, the creamy dipping sauces).
- Pick side items carefully. If your teen wants potatoes with his chicken, steer him toward a baked potato (topped with salsa rather than butter and sour cream). Or he could order fruit salad or corn on the cob.

Subs

- Select lean meats (chicken, turkey breast) on whole-wheat. *Tip:* Watch out for flavors like barbecue or teriyaki, which pack a lot of sodium.
- Fill up on vegetables. For better nutrition and taste, go ahead and ask for *all* the fresh vegetables to be added!



Tacos

- Choose soft tacos, since the hard shells are fried in oil until crisp. Hold the sour cream, ask for half the amount of cheese and just a little guacamole—it has healthy fats, but a spoonful is enough.
- Choose plain beans (black, pinto) rather than refried beans or those cooked with bacon.

Asian

- Get steamed or stir-fried dishes instead of deep-fried ones (General Tso’s chicken, for example, is typically deep-fried). Add whole grains to the meal by requesting steamed brown rice instead of fried or white rice.
- At sushi places, ask for brown rice. Skip the sushi rolls with sauces or fried items, and if you use soy sauce, make it low-sodium.

Pizza

- Pick thin crust over thick, flavored, or stuffed crust.
- Top your pie with vegetables and fruits like diced green peppers, spinach, or pineapple. Avoid pepperoni, bacon, and other fatty options.

Grab-and-go cups

One reason fast food is so popular is that it’s convenient. Your teen can create his own snack and meal cups that are also easy to take along.

Have him fill small cups or containers with items like these, store them in the refrigerator or pantry, and add a plastic fork or spoon. He’ll have everything he needs for a healthy bite on the go.

PB & veggies

Place peanut butter in the bottom of a cup, and stand up carrot and celery sticks in it.

Note: Substitute almond, soy, or cashew butter if your child has a peanut allergy.



Energy mix

Combine plain popcorn with mini-pretzels, dried cranberries, and walnuts.

Raspberry cheesecake

Spoon in $\frac{1}{8}$ cup low-sugar raspberry jam. Add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup nonfat cottage cheese, and 3 crushed low-fat vanilla wafers.

Bean mash-up

Mash together white beans from one 15-ounce can (drained, rinsed), $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. olive oil, and chopped red onion, if desired. Season with pepper and a little salt. Divide into cups, and top with shredded lettuce or cabbage.

Editor’s Note: Teen Food & Fitness™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.

