

Healthy eating for adolescent boys aged 14 to 18

As an adolescent boy aged 14 to 18 you need enough nutritious food to help you grow and develop.

Why eat healthily?

At this age, due to the rapid rate at which you are growing, your nutrient and energy requirements are high.

Eating healthily is the best way to give your developing body the nutrition it needs.

Research shows that along with healthy eating, you also need to get physically active for at least 60 minutes a day to stay as healthy as possible.

See [Australia's Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines](#).

Visit [Youth Central](#) for more information about getting active.

Healthy eating guidelines for adolescent boys

The [Australian Dietary Guidelines](#) outline what is a healthy diet for adolescent boys aged 14 to 18 with average height and an inactive (sedentary) to moderately active lifestyle..

Australian Dietary Guidelines serving recommendations by food group

Food group	Example serving size	Serves per day	Example of essential nutrients
Grains (cereal) foods	1 slice of bread or ½ a medium roll or flat bread (40 g), ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, noodles, ½ cup of cooked porridge or polenta, 2/3 cup breakfast cereal flakes (30 g) or ½ cup muesli	7 serves	Fibre, carbohydrates, protein, iron, zinc, magnesium, B group vitamins, vitamin E
Vegetables and legume/beans	½ cup cooked vegetables (75 g), 1 cup salad vegetables, 1 small potato, ½ cup cooked dried or canned beans, chickpeas or lentils (no added salt)	5½ serves	Fibre, carbohydrate, vitamin C, vitamin E, magnesium, potassium, folate, protein, iron
Fruits	1 medium piece of fresh fruit (150 g), 30 g dried fruit (e.g. 4 dried apricot halves), 1 cup canned fruit (150 g)	2 serves	Fibre, carbohydrate, vitamin C, vitamin E, magnesium, potassium, folate

Food group	Example serving size	Serves per day	Example of essential nutrients
Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts, seeds, legumes/beans*	65 g cooked lean red meat (e.g. beef, lamb, pork, venison or kangaroo) or ½ cup of lean mince, 2 small chops, 80 g cooked poultry, 100 g cooked fish fillet or 1 small can of fish, 2 large eggs, 170 g tofu, 30 g nuts or seeds	2½ serves	Protein, essential fatty acids (found in fish, e.g. omega 3 and omega 6), iron, vitamin B12, iodine, zinc
Milk, yogurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat*	1 cup (250 ml) milk, 200 g tub of yoghurt, 40 g or 2 slices of cheese, 120 g ricotta cheese	3½ serves	Calcium, protein, vitamin A, vitamin B12, iodine, zinc, riboflavin
Saturated oils and fats (e.g. butter, cream, lard, coconut and palm kernel oils)		use in small amounts	

* If you follow a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle, **plan your diet** to be sure it includes all the essential nutrients.

If you are taller or more active, you can have an additional 0–2½ serves per day, selected from:

- foods from any of the **five food groups**, or
- unsaturated spreads or oils (such as olive oil, canola oil, nut butters or avocado paste), or
- **discretionary choices**. However, discretionary choices are not needed as part of a healthy diet and, if eaten, should only be eaten occasionally.

Visit **Youth central** for more information about healthy eating for young people.

Eating for a healthy weight

Achieving or maintaining a healthy weight is all about balancing the energy you take in with the energy you burn (energy out). It's important to stay active and limit sedentary behaviors such as watching TV, using phones, iPads and computers, and playing video or computer games, to no more than two hours per day.

To find out more about the relationship between food and energy, see **Balancing energy in and energy out**.

How to start healthy eating habits

It's easy to grab a biscuit, some chips, a sausage roll or a chocolate bar when you're hungry. But convenience, takeaway and fried foods are only for enjoying occasionally. These foods are high in salt, sugar and saturated fat (which means they are high in kilojoules), so eating them regularly will make it easier for you to gain weight.

Start your healthy eating habits by:

- drinking plain water or milk instead of sugary drinks
- choosing a handful of nuts (30 g), a piece of fruit, or a tub of plain yoghurt (200 g) for a healthy snack instead of chips, biscuits, cakes or pastries
- choosing wholegrain and high fibre cereals and wholegrain and high fibre toast (with eggs, avocado and nut spreads) for breakfast instead of sugary breakfast cereals or toast with bacon, butter or jam

- choosing lean meats, poultry (skin off), fish, eggs, tofu, legumes, vegetables and wholegrain breads, rice and pasta for meals
- reducing the amount of fast food and processed meats (such as ham, bacon) that you eat
- avoiding adding extra sugar and salt to your food.

Common dietary issues for adolescent boys aged 14 to 18

Here are some of the more common dietary issues that can affect adolescent boys aged 14 to 18, and what you can do about them.

Alcohol and teenagers

There's plenty of research to show that drinking alcohol can cause serious short- and long-term harm, such as obesity, heart disease, liver disease, high cholesterol, poor mental health, and some cancers such as oesophageal, colon and liver cancer. Alcohol is a drug. It causes health problems that accumulate over a lifetime. If you are under 18, you are strongly advised to avoid drinking any alcohol, as it can interfere with your growing brain.

Visit Youth Central for more information about [**alcohol**](#).

Obesity

Obesity is a risk factor for type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

For more about obesity in children and adolescents, see [**Obesity in children – causes**](#).

For information on healthy weight loss, see [**Weight loss – a healthy approach**](#) and [**Body image and diets**](#).

Eating disorders

Poor body image can lead to self-destructive behaviours such as dieting and binge-eating, and these behaviours can put you at risk of developing an eating disorder. Although eating disorders are not as common for teenage boys as they are for teenage girls, it can still be an issue.

Read more about [**eating disorders**](#) and learn about [**positive body image**](#).

Eating disorders are serious mental illnesses. They usually start in adolescence. The two most serious are anorexia nervosa (anorexia) and bulimia nervosa (bulimia). Anorexia is characterised by an intense fear of gaining weight and a relentless pursuit of thinness. Bulimia is characterised by binge eating and purging.

Anorexia and bulimia are both treatable, but they can be life-threatening if severe and left untreated. It's really important to identify early warning signs – such as abnormal eating patterns, ongoing loss of weight, and preoccupation with thinness and dieting – and get help as soon as possible.

See [**Anorexia nervosa**](#), [**Bulimia nervosa**](#) and [**Eating disorders and adolescents**](#) for more information.

Inadequate bone density

It's common for adolescent boys not to have enough calcium in their diet. Calcium is very important to support your growing bones during your teenage years. Maximising your bone density at this time and during early adult life can help prevent weakened bones and osteoporosis in later life.

For more information, see 'Milk, yogurt, cheese and/or alternatives, mostly reduced fat' in the Australian Dietary Guidelines table.

Find out more about calcium, see [**10 tips on how to eat more calcium**](#).

Iron deficiency anaemia

Due to the rapid growth your body experiences during adolescence, your iron requirements are higher than they were during your later childhood years. This means that boys aged 14 to 18 are at risk of not having enough iron in their diet, which can lead to iron deficiency anaemia. Adolescent boys need 11 mg iron per day.

For food that is high in iron see 'Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts, seeds, legumes/beans' and 'Grains (cereal) foods' in the Australian Dietary Guidelines table.

For information on how to get more iron in your diet, see [iron](#).

Dental problems

According to the Australian Dental Association, 68 per cent of Australian school students have at least one tooth that has been eroded. This can be caused by the acidity of sugary drinks, as well as bacterial fermentation, which can occur from eating sugar.

So it's important to limit your intake of sugary food and drinks – enjoy them only sometimes, and in small amounts. And be sure to maintain good dental hygiene by brushing and flossing your teeth daily.

For more information, see [Soft drinks, juice and sweet drinks – limit intake](#).

Note that this page does not apply to men with specific health conditions. For more information, please consult:

- your **GP (doctor)**
- a dietitian accredited with the [Dietitians Association of Australia](#)
- a nutritionist accredited with the [Nutrition Society of Australia](#).

Where to get help for eating disorders

- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- A GP with experience supporting people with an eating disorder
- **Eating Disorders Victoria Helpline** Tel. **1300 550 236** – support from Monday to Friday, 9.30 am to 5.00 pm
- Community health centre
- **Lifeline** Tel. **13 11 14**
- **Kids Helpline** Tel. **1800 55 1800**
- **Butterfly Foundation's National Support Line** Tel. 1800 ED HOPE (**1800 33 4673**) – support from 8 am to 12 am, 7 days a week (except national public holidays)

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

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