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Teenage diet dilemma

Subtle hints trump nagging in the battle to win over teenagers, writes Jacquie Dale.



Teen vanity will hold more sway than a parent's concerns.

Photo: Michael Clayton-Jones

MOTIVATING YOUR teenager to eat well can feel like an endless battle as teenagers assert independence from your control.

Consumed with raging hormones, they go overboard with extreme diets and frequently eliminate entire food groups. Influenced by supermodels, magazines and sporting stars, teenagers often resort to secretly starving, fad diets or using slimming pills and party pills as unhealthy measures to lose weight. Poor dietary habits can lead to serious deficiencies which can make your teenager harder to live with and possibly affect future health.

Nagging them about their future health will do little to motivate them. The key is to focus on their body image concerns; most teenagers worry about their figure or acne, girls want to look slim and toned, and boys want to look athletic and muscular.

Teenagers need extra nutrients to support growth, which begins in girls at 10 years and in boys at 12. About half of adult bone structure is deposited during adolescence. Both boys and girls need minerals such as calcium, iron and zinc to

support increasing bone mass, muscle mass and a larger blood supply during the teen years. Whatever you do don't bore your child with these facts, they won't care. Your best bet is to leave this article open on the coffee table – teenagers are nosy mammals and the following information may help them combat acne, fatigue and improve their body image.

COMBATING ACNE

Because of normal fluctuations of testosterone in boys and girls during puberty, proteins such as keratin and sebum in the skin are overstimulated and can block pores. The severity of acne can be caused by a combination of hormonal factors, sebum production and poor nutrition. Vitamins and minerals such as zinc, vitamin A, chromium and vitamin B6 play an important role in healthy skin. Teenagers who don't get enough zinc get sick

more often and recover from illnesses very slowly. Zinc is found in protein foods like red meat, oysters, shellfish and lesser quantities in nuts and legumes.

BEING SLIM

A growing number of teenage girls are using desperate measures to lose weight. A study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* surveyed more than 2500 teenagers over a two-year period at an American high school. They found 92% of the girls had engaged in some kind of unhealthy weight control behaviour. A body starved of nutrients will perceive a famine and want to re-gain fat quickly in an effort to survive. A body that gets its full range of nutrients will burn fat, an undernourished body will slow down metabolic functions or cannibalise itself in an effort to survive. Exercise helps improve blood flow which in turn helps deliver nutrients to more cells in the body and a

daily multi-vitamin and mineral formula will help fill missing gaps.

LEAN, TONED, ATHLETIC

Teenage boys need increased amounts of nutrients like amino acids, calcium, zinc and iron. Vitamin C is also necessary to aid the absorption of iron. An active teenage boy may need to consume more than 3000 calories a day to maintain his weight. Eating breakfast is one of the easiest ways to help fuel muscle. Teenagers who eat breakfast consume less fat and get higher amounts of carbohydrates and protein over the day. Nagging about healthy eating can fall on deaf ears, but during the next acne break-out you may like to suggest multi-vitamins as a new wonder acne cure or slimming pill. Motivating change in your teenager may mean focusing on their obsessions.

■ Jacquie Dale
www.realnutrition.co.nz

Ask the doctor

Each week, Dunedin doctor Paul Trotman answers your health questions.

Q. What can you tell me about the antibiotic Staphlex? I had unpleasant side effects like pain down the right side of my back and was sick a couple of times. I did not take the last two because of this. I did tell my doctor about this, with no reaction. I am not on any other medication and feel OK again.

A. Staphlex is a brand of flucloxacillin; it's related to penicillin. It is particularly good for treating skin infections and cellulitis (a skin infection that has started to spread). The penicillins are some of the oldest and safest of the antibiotics although they often make people feel a bit sick (that's not an allergy – for it to be a true allergy you have to get a rash, or have your face or airways swell up). There is one known problem with flucloxacillin – it can affect your liver, this complication is rare but if you go yellow while taking it, or even a few weeks after taking it, see your doctor immediately.



Q. I'm wondering about the spam ads I keep getting for Viagra and other drugs – do they work? Are they real drugs? What about the herbal equivalents?

A. There's a bit of a double whammy here. First, 60% of the medicines you order are fake or substandard (yes, someone really has tested them). And second, even if they do work, Medsafe (the people who regulate medicines in New Zealand) will confiscate them unless you have reasonable excuse – a prescription or letter from a New Zealand doctor – so you might as well just take it down to your chemist and save the hassle. Viagra is an incredibly sophisticated drug that targets specific receptors in the blood vessels of the genitals opening them up and allowing increased blood flow. There is no herbal equivalent (after all, trees don't need erections to reproduce). Whatever the ads say, no herbal equivalent has ever been shown to work.

■ Do you have a question for Doctor Paul? Email escape@star-times.co.nz with Doctor in the subject line.

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Time to chill out



Q. Why is it that pretty girls always seem miserable and less attractive girls are always happy?

A. The operative word is "seem". This is a pretty big generalisation, and also depends on your definition of what makes a girl "pretty". I really don't think that whether a girl is happy or not can be deduced solely from whether you think she is pretty.

Q. I have really strong opinions and wonder if that

is putting people off. Do you think I should just shut up and keep it to myself?

A. You are who you are and you will want to be with someone who loves you for who you are. Having said that, you are not just someone who has strong opinions. So let the other great aspects of your character shine. Many people choose the path of least resistance when going into a relationship. They want it to be easy, like to be able to relax with a partner, but also be stimulated and



challenged. Many people tend to avoid conflict, too. So if you are showing

primarily strong opinions when with others, potential partners might wonder if they could relax with you. What you want to aim for is balance. Show your chilled out side. If you want to attract a wider group of partners, choose when you want to discuss your stronger opinions. Alternatively, you might still want to share them, but alter your tone and way of communicating them.

■ Email your questions to escape@star-times.co.nz with dating in the subject line. www.datingadvice.co.nz

Each week, dating coach Denise Corlett answers your match-making questions.