

Diet and nutrition for teenagers with CHD

Eating healthily is a good way to look after yourself, which is extra important when you have a heart condition. The following guidance has been prepared by an Evelina dietician, especially for young people with CHD.

There are already many articles in the media advising about how to have a healthy diet. Children with CHD may need extra calories when they are babies to help them thrive but after that a normal balanced diet is recommended.

Foods with a high salt, sugar and fat content, such as processed and pre-prepared foods and snacks can, over long periods of time, be damaging to our bodies. It can affect the heart and kidneys and may lead to diabetes and raised blood pressure which increases the risks of strokes and damage to the body's major organs.

Children should eat a variety of foods throughout the day so they have a selection of two or three from each food group, aiming for five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Sugary foods, snacks and drinks should be limited to mealtimes or special occasions.

Food groups:

- Cereals – bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, breakfast cereals.
- Fruit and vegetables – includes fruit juice, dried and fresh fruit.
- Milk – cheese, yoghurt and milk.
- Meat, fish and other proteins – fish, meat, nuts, pulses.

As teenagers, you're at a stage in your life where you are lucky enough to be still growing! And just as a gardener may give his plants special food to ensure good strong growth, you too need a healthy diet to make sure that you continue to grow strong and stay well.

Healthy eating can also:

- Give you more ENERGY for doing things with your friends
- Help you CONCENTRATE and boost your memory – important for learning

Nutrition experts often talk about a 'balanced' healthy diet. What does this actually mean?

A 'balanced' diet actually means eating a *variety* of foods each day, to provide all the essential bits and pieces needed for you to grow well and have energy.

Let's look at this in more detail. Foods can be placed into 1 of 5 groups.

Foods for energy (also called carbohydrate or starchy foods)

This group of foods is packed with energy – they give us strength to do all the things we want to.

Members include bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, breakfast cereal and other starchy foods

Foods for repair and growth (also called protein foods)

This group of **protein** foods supplies building blocks. Imagine these building blocks to be like Lego bricks. Our body will use these building blocks to help us to grow and, if we hurt ourselves, or if we need an operation in hospital, these foods help us to heal and to get better.

Members include meat, fish, eggs, cheese, peas, pulses e.g. chickpeas, lentils, kidney beans etc., and other protein sources e.g. nut cutlets, soy mince, etc

Some of the foods in this group are also a good source of iron. Iron is important for keeping your blood healthy. Red meat is the best source of iron. Other foods such as pulses also contain iron, but it's more difficult for the body to use this iron. If you drink a glass of orange juice with these foods, it helps the body to use the iron in them more easily.

Foods for tools

The body needs certain foods to use as 'tools' for making and doing things. These 'tools' are known as **vitamins** and **minerals**.

This group is called fruit and vegetables and includes apples, bananas, pears, salad vegetables, peas, sweet corn, carrots, broccoli, peppers and many, many more!

Foods for healthy bones, teeth

These foods are a good source of an essential tool called **calcium**-needed by the body to promote strong bones and teeth.

This group is called *Milk and dairy foods* and includes milk, cheese, yoghurts and milky puddings.

Foods for treats

These foods are usually high in **fat** or **sugar** or both!

One of the reasons why chocolate tastes so nice is that one of its ingredients is fat. Generally fat makes our food taste nice. Although the body needs fat to work well, we only need a small amount.

Sugar is also part of this group. Like fat we don't need as much as we normally eat. To keep well and full of energy, it's best to eat less sugar and sugary snacks.

Members include crisps, chips, fried foods, sweets, chocolate, cakes and biscuits.

Eating lots of fat is not good for your heart and eating lots of sugar is not good for your teeth. Eating large amounts of these foods can make you put on too much weight and that is not healthy for your heart.

So ... a 'balanced diet' means eating a selection of all foods, in particular protein, starchy, milk and dairy foods, fruit and vegetables and some fatty and sugary foods. If you can do this, it will help you stay well, grow strong and always be full of energy!

...By the way, occasionally eating things like chocolate is part of a balanced healthy, enjoyable diet!