Building good food habits is not just about what your tween or teen eats, but also about how much he eats. Share these tips to keep him from overeating.

**Slow down**
It can take 15 minutes for the brain to realize the stomach is full—a delay that may lead to eating too much. To allow time for the message to get through, your teenager might:

- Set down his fork between bites.
- Chew slowly, and focus on the flavors.
- Wake up earlier to allow enough time for breakfast, or eat breakfast at school.

**Divide and conquer**
Help your tween outsmart the urge to “eat the whole thing” by suggesting that he:

- Dish up a serving instead of eating directly from a carton or bag.
- Split a restaurant meal with a friend, or box up half to take home.
- Create single-serving portions. For example, fill baggies with a helping of trail mix, and cut cheese into 1-oz. cubes.

**Avoid distracted dining**
Your child may overeat when he's focused on the TV, his phone, or his homework. To keep his mind on his food, he should:

- Always sit down to eat.
- Leave electronics in another room.
- Have a snack in the kitchen rather than at his desk.

Idea: Smaller dishes fool the mind into thinking you’re eating more. Consider serving dessert in cups rather than bowls, for instance.

**Family fitness traditions**
Holidays don't have to focus solely on food. Make being active a new tradition with these suggestions.

**Catch up over catch.** Stand in a circle, and toss a ball around—asking a question on every third or fourth throw. You tween might ask her uncle, “What’s your favorite book?” He can answer her question while everyone continues throwing the ball. Then, her uncle gets to ask someone else a question.

**Take an active neighborhood tour.** Let your teen lead everyone on a brisk walk around the block. Stop at a basketball court to shoot hoops or at a soccer field to kick goals. She might also introduce younger cousins to the local playground.
School lunch: Hot and healthy

Cafeteria lunches make it easy for your teen to choose nutritious (and delicious) options to fuel her body and brain. Here are ways to help her get the most out of school meals.

Review the menu. Keep a copy of the cafeteria menu at home (or look it up online), and talk about it with your tween. What looks good this week? At dinner or after school, ask what she ate—and why she picked it. You’ll learn about her preferences and show that you’re interested in her day.

Try new things. Schools offer a variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, which are all important for a healthy lifestyle. Challenge your child to sample new foods that incorporate these options like spinach-artichoke flatbread pizza. Idea: Ask her to share suggestions on how you can “healthy up” favorites at home, too.

Tip: Your teenager may qualify for free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch. Check with her school for details and to apply.

Homemade food gifts are a fun and low-cost way for you and your teen to spread holiday cheer! Consider these ideas that look nice in clear glass jars.

Strawberry–chia seed jam
Cook 2 cups frozen strawberries in a pot over medium heat until the berries break down, 5–10 minutes. Stir in 1 tbsp. lemon juice and 2 tbsp. honey. Remove from heat. Sprinkle with 2 tbsp. chia seeds (or sesame seeds), and let cool and thicken. Refrigerate.

Winter spice mix
Using ground spices, combine 1/4 cup cinnamon, 1 tbsp. nutmeg, 1 tbsp. allspice, and 1/4 tsp. ginger. Add a label to the jar noting that the blend can add flavor to sweet potatoes, oatmeal, or warm milk.

Sunflower seed butter
Roast 2 cups shelled, unsalted sunflower seeds in a single layer on a pan at 350° until fragrant, about 10 minutes. In a blender or food processor, blend 5–7 minutes until smooth. Stir in a pinch of salt, and keep refrigerated.

Teen Food & Fitness™

OUR PURPOSE
To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for their children.

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Teen Food & Fitness™ is reviewed by a registered diettian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.

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