

Proper Nutrition for Adolescents

Hew's Reference Guide



Why adolescent nutrition?

Adolescence is the period between 10-19 years of age marked by increased nutritional need for fast growth and it is a period when lifelong health habits are established. This period is known to be the only remaining window of opportunity for nutrition promotion next to the first 1000 days.

This period is critical because, during this time, adolescents:

- Gain up to 50 % of their adult weight.
- Gain more than 20 % of their adult height.
- Build 50 % of their adult skeletal mass.



In Ethiopia, adolescents generally receive less attention, and their nutrition needs are not often met. As a result,

- 3 out of every 10 adolescent girls (15 to 19 years old) are underweight; in Somali region, this figure is more than half, or 1 out of every 2 girls.
- 1 out of every 5 girls are anemic; in Somali region, the figure is 1 out of every 2 girls (half the number of adolescent girls in the region).

During this period, proper nutrition for adolescents and particularly for adolescent girls helps to improve their nutritional status and ensure their participation in education, access to health care, which in turn help them have the leverage to say no to early marriage and childbearing at early age. Adolescent nutrition plays a critical role in building an empowered new generation.

Roles of school principals and teachers in improving adolescent nutrition

Teachers and school principals apparently have a great deal of responsibility in creating a network between schools and the community and in overseeing the school activities through a day today and periodic contacts with students and parents respectively. We are confident that schoolteachers and principals can make a difference in the improvement of adolescent nutrition through their collaboration with health extension workers, school community, club leaders and other community structures and promoting adolescent nutrition messages to parents and students.

Principals and teachers can play their part by performing the following key tasks.

1. In terms of improving diet diversity and diet quality:

- Provide nutrition education and encourage adolescent students to eat foods from each of the 5 food groups every day.
- Educate and encourage adolescents to eat 3 regular meals a day and another snack and parents to be supportive.
- Encourage adolescents to carry healthy snacks like nuts, bread, and bananas to school to consume during recess and parents to be supportive.

2. In terms of promoting healthy food choices:

- Encourage adolescents and their parents to say no to junk foods such as sugary beverages/ soda drinks, salty and high fat packets of snacks.
- Encourage them to eat before they feel hungry.
- Educate the youth to eat healthy foods and encourage families to be supportive.

3. In order to improving practices of personal hygiene:

- Remind / teach them to wash their hands with soap and water before eating.
- Encourage them to eat before they feel hungry.
- Remind/ teach them to wash their hands with soap after toilet use.

4. As regards keeping them focused on completing their education and choosing a healthier lifestyle:

- Encourage adolescent girls not to miss any classes and to make the most out of the daily lessons.
- Help adolescent girls not to engage in early marriage and to stay active in their education.
- Encourage active participation of adolescent girls in school clubs and other extracurricular activities.

Key adolescent nutrition messages

For parents

1. Have your children eaten at least one meal daily combining each of the 5 food groups so that they will be healthy and perform better academically?
2. Have your children eaten 3 regular meals a day and one more snack? This keeps your children to grow well and maintain normal body weight.
3. Make sure your children are eating breakfast before going to school as it helps them to follow their school lessons attentively.
4. Prepare snacks such as kolo (roasted mix of cereals, legumes and nuts), beans, bread, or bananas for your children to carry to school and consume them during recess. This will help your children follow their lessons attentively and perform better academically.
5. Encourage your children to wash hands with soap and water before eating and after toilet use so that they keep healthy.
6. Help your children to avoid drinking soft drinks, eating salty and high fat foods for them to be healthy.

For adolescents

1. Every day, eat at least one meal that combines items from each of the 5 food groups. That will keep you healthy and help you perform better academically.
2. Make sure you eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner and one additional snack a day. Doing this regularly will enable you to grow well and gain normal body weight.
3. Eat breakfast before going to school. Eating breakfast will help you to follow your lessons properly and perform better academically.
4. Bring snacks like nuts, bread, and fruits to school and eat during recess. Eating snacks enables you to follow your lessons without being distracted by a feeling of hunger and helps you to perform better academically.
5. Wash your hands with soap and water before eating and after using the toilet. The practice will keep you healthy, and you are less likely to miss your classes because of illnesses.
6. Avoid drinking soft drinks, eating salty and high fat foods, and then you can keep healthy.
7. Monitor your BMI every three months to check if you are maintaining the right weight.

Key Message

- In addition to bread, kocho, or injera, make sure you eat one meal every day combining items from each of the 5 food groups, and maintain a balanced weight and be successful in your studies.

Key Message for Somali region

- In addition to injera, spaghetti or rice, make sure you eat one meal every day combining items from each of the 5 food groups and maintain a balanced weight and be successful in your studies.

Benefits of each food group

Food group	Nutrients provided	Function to the body
<p>1. Fish, eggs, chicken, liver, meat</p> 	<p>Meat group: These foods are a rich source of iron, zinc, vitamin B 12.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They provide essential fatty acids and quality protein. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iron prevents anemia and helps for brain development. • Zinc is useful to maintain our immunity. • Vitamin B-12 is essential for normal functioning of nerves. • Quality proteins are needed for body building, growth and development.
<p>2. Milk and milk products</p> 	<p>Milk, yoghurt, cheese:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They provide protein, calcium and phosphorous. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They help for growth, strengthening and maintenance of bones and teeth.
<p>3. Legumes: peas, beans, chick peas, lentils, etc.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These foods provide protein, vitamin 12 and energy. • They are relatively a cheaper source of protein and micronutrients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zinc is an important element to maintain immunity. • Vitamin B-12 is useful for normal functioning of nerves. • Quality proteins are needed for body building, growth and development.
<p>4. Dark green vegetables</p> 	<p>Leafy dark green vegetables: Kale, Swiss chard, broccoli, etc.</p> <p>Roots and fruit vegetables: Carrots, tomatoes, pumpkin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They provide Vitamin A and C, folate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vitamin A improves vision & strengthens our immunity system and prevents us from infections. • Vitamin C helps to heal wounds and repair tissues. • Folate: Type of Vitamin B: Prevents neural tube defects.
<p>5. Fruits</p> 	<p>Papaya, mango, avocado, guava, banana, lemon, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foods in this group are rich in vitamins A & C. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vitamin A protects from night blindness. • Vitamin C helps to heal wounds and repair tissues.



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