

Expert Suggests How To Improve Diet Of Children And Adolescents - Healthy, Creative Tiffin Ideas

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In recent years, there has been a shift in the eating habits and lifestyle of adolescents, which has resulted in multiple health issues. Therefore, the 'Let's fix our food' initiative is launched by the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI) in collaboration with UNICEF and consortium partners, to create a space for adolescents to participate in and create a

conducive food environment in the country. This initiative also highlights the importance of healthy food habits among adolescents and to get them back to seasonal, home-cooked and natural food from packaged food. This initiative aims at demonstrating and creating a dialogue around healthy diets and lifestyles across food habits, physical activity, and screen time also. As, reduced levels of physical activity among adolescents make them vulnerable to long-term ailments, especially contracting diet-related non-communicable diseases.

Also read: [4 Indian Ingredients To Include In The Diet Of Children To Ensure Growth And Health](#)

Changes in the diet of early adolescents can begin with small steps, such as creating quality and attractive lunch boxes for children. The key lies in packing the right set of nutrients in the box through a variety of high-quality food choices. An impactful and nutritious lunch box can be made in the following way:

Healthy Tiffin Ideas For Children And Adolescents:

1. Including Fresh Fruits

A recent study conducted by UNICE revealed that the consumption of fruits by adolescents has decreased. Including five portions of fresh fruits into one's daily diet can bolster one's mental and physical development. Consumption of a variety of fruit, especially seasonal, local, cheaply available fruits, such as guavas, bananas, apples, oranges, melon chunks, or grapes is imperative. Inclusion of these fruits will ensure adolescents get the full range of vitamins and minerals that is required, resulting in a positive effect on their mental and physical development as they grow older.



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2. Including Protein And Iron

Due to a fall in the consumption of protein by children, parents must provide them with the right portions of protein as this food group plays a pivotal role in cognitive development, especially during peak periods of growth in teens. Iron is another important factor that is essential for your child's health and can be found in animal sources (meat and fish) and plant sources (wholegrain cereals including millets, dark green leafy vegetables, pulses and dried fruits). However, in case it is difficult, the inclusion of pulses and dark leafy vegetables can help as they contain other nutrients also important for eyesight and immune system.



3. Adopting A 'Green Choice' Lifestyle

Placing a snack box along with the lunch box can have a tremendous impact on your child's health. It could help actively replace the overconsumption of unhealthy food items, such as biscuits, chips, aerated drinks, etc. By substituting unhealthy snacks with healthy choices like fruit and vegetables, wholemeal/wholegrain bread/toast with a small amount of butter, or a low-fat spread of honey, natural yogurt, unsweetened wholegrain cereals, a boost in energy and normal glucose levels can be seen.

4. Incorporating Dairy-Based Products

Calcium plays an extremely crucial role in the physical development of adolescents. Not only does it help in the strengthening of bones and teeth, but it also plays an important role in blood clotting, helping muscles to contract and regulating normal heart rhythms and nerve functions. The addition of unflavoured milk, plain curd, small amounts of cheese like cottage cheese and string cheese could help in the strengthening of bones and muscles. In case your adolescent is lactose intolerant, dairy-free options like soy milk and soy yogurt, which contain similar amounts of calcium, protein and vitamin D, could be used instead.

Also read: [Dairy Rich Diet: From Paneer To Ghee, 5 Milk Products You Can Add To Your Diet](#)



5. Adding Nuts And Wholegrain Products

Walnuts, pistachios, cashews, raisins and pumpkin seeds are known to contain high amounts of folate, iron, protein, vitamin E and zinc. Nuts including almonds are small packages that are filled with extremely high levels of nutrition that aid in improving cognitive function and academic performance in children. They serve as fuel to the brain and help in improving the memory of the children. They also secrete the "happy hormone" serotonin, thus keeping the child stress-free and joyous. Seeds are rich in fibre and protein. Quinoa, oats, brown rice, whole grain bread, etc., consist of important nutrients like fibre, carbohydrates, vitamin B and protein within them. Whole-grain items are packed with nutrients and phytochemicals that have a range of known health benefits. Peanuts also contain high-quality protein. They help in reducing the risk of heart disease, blood sugar spikes and can help your adolescent feel fuller for longer periods, thus avoiding overeating at irregular intervals. It provides them with a sustained release of energy to the body.



Fluid needs vary based on a child's age, size, gender, and activity level. It is recommended to consume around 4 cups for toddlers going up to 7-8 cups for children and 8- 11 cups of water per day for adolescents. A part of this amount can be received from foods rich in water content, like fruits and vegetables. It is important to note that along with dietary changes, the consumption of sugary drinks should also be monitored. Over the years, it has been noticed that sugary drinks are a major contributor to the rise in obesity and type 2 diabetes in children. Providing a complete and healthy diet comprising minerals, vitamins, and antioxidants, along with recommended physical activity would help in providing nourishment to the brain and relieve it from stress or anxiety. Therefore, parents should aim at providing adequate nutritious diet including seasonal, local options to their children, ensuring their overall growth and development.

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