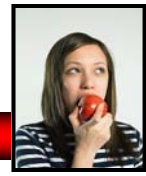




# LIFEGUARD YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®



GUARD YOUR **HEART**

GUARD YOUR **MIND**

GUARD YOUR **BODY**

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In this issue...

- Understanding the Teen Brain, Part 4: *The Importance of Eating Healthy*
- Easy ways to eat right

## Understanding the Teen Brain

### The Importance of Eating Healthy

With the fast paced life that most families lead today, eating a nutritious meal can seem more of a luxury than a necessity. Since everyone seems to be constantly on the go, some parents feel that it was a “good day” if their kids made it to *most* of their commitments (on time or not) and had *something* to eat (whether that means a granola bar on the run or a “drive-through” dinner). **In fact, 40% of the calories that Americans consume are ingested outside the home—and this figure is only rising.** We can probably safely assume that the majority of the food consumed outside the home is not a nutritious low-fat salad or the like, but rather food that is processed, fried, high in fat, high in sodium, greasy, and has virtually zero nutritious value. Knowing this, why is this type of food so appealing? Simply put, it's fast, cheap, tastes good (to most), and it's easy. While all of this can be very appealing, most don't realize the damage that they are doing to themselves, and most importantly, to their children. Essentially, **you are what you eat whether you realize it or not. Almost every facet of your body relies on the food you eat, so it should be no surprise that your brain also runs on the “fuel” you give it.**



### Food For Thought

There is ample research and evidence that has shown that nutrition has an effect on students' learning. In fact, something as simple as missing breakfast or not eating a nutritious breakfast just one day can effect your child's capacity to learn and retain information. Although trying to eat healthy for all meals and snacks is important, many experts agree that breakfast is the most important meal for your child—and **those who don't eat a healthy breakfast have shown compromised abilities in mathematics, reading abilities, late morning problem solving tasks, and poorer behavior.** Making time to prepare food in the morning can be difficult since many feel that mornings are the most hectic. Typically, getting your teen up in time to get to school before the first bell rings is hard enough, nonetheless squeezing in a nutritious breakfast. However, **starting the day with nutritious food has been found to improve math grades, reduce hyperactivity, decrease absence and tardy rates, and improve behavior!** Set the example by getting up early enough to have time to prepare a well-balanced breakfast for your family. The most important nutrients that are tied to better scholastic achievement are: carbohydrates, protein, iron, and calcium. An example of a good breakfast that includes these vital nutrients could be: whole wheat toast, eggs, milk, and a handful of fruit.



### Eating together has surprising benefits

Even though preparing a meal and miraculously gathering everyone to sit still long enough to eat can be very difficult, it has some pretty astonishing benefits. Studies have shown that eating together on a routine basis improves communication, which helps build stronger families. Additionally, the more frequent a family has meals together, the more likely their children will perform better academically and the less likely that they will engage in at risk behaviors. **In fact, teen who eat with their parent at least twice a week are four times less likely to engage in sexual activity.** There are so many reasons to eat right and eat together, we hope that you now have enough motivation to take the time and effort to help your family be healthy—in all areas!

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## Easy Ways to Eat Right

The following are a few tips to help you and your family eat a more balanced diet. It doesn't always take elaborate meals that take hours of preparation, some faster and easier ways to eat better include:



- **Limiting your options:** keep only a few treats around and stock up on fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods
- **Being Prepared:** Carry around nutritious snacks like whole wheat crackers, carrot sticks, and peanuts
- **Planning ahead:** Make a habit of setting aside an hour a week to make the next week's menu that includes a variety of food groups—and then stick with your list when you go to the store
- **Portion Control:** Try not to fill your plate full (even if it's healthy). Instead, start small, and if you're still hungry, get a little more

For more information call: 816-836-8336. To unsubscribe, please email [bgray@guardyourself.org](mailto:bgray@guardyourself.org)  
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