

# Teenagers 12-18 Years

## Fueling a Healthy Future with Essential Nutrition

Adolescence is one of the most rapid periods of growth outside of infancy — a time when bones lengthen, muscles develop, hormones shift and the brain continues to mature.<sup>1</sup> Nutrition plays a central role in helping teens meet their full potential. During these years, needs for energy, protein and iron increase, and adequate calcium and vitamin D are especially important to achieve peak bone mass.<sup>2</sup> This creates a valuable opportunity to prioritize nutrient-rich foods that deliver meaningful nutrition in every bite. Milk, cheese and yogurt stand out, providing more bone-building nutrients per calorie than any other food group and offering a simple, accessible way to support this high-intensity phase of growth.<sup>3</sup>



### Dairy's Unique Contributions

Teenagers are constantly on the go and enjoy more independence, so it's important that they understand why — and how — to make healthy food choices. Milk, cheese and yogurt can play an important role in supporting their continued growth, development and overall well-being, providing several essential nutrients, such as:



Calcium, vitamin D and phosphorus, which help build strong bones and teeth.



Magnesium, which supports muscle function and energy production.



Choline\*, which helps support cognitive health and the conversion of food to fuel.<sup>4</sup>

\*One serving of milk provides 8% of the Daily Value for choline.

### Special Considerations



**Skin Health:**<sup>5</sup> Acne is a common concern for teens linked to a variety of potential causes, from hormones and increased oil production to family history and other risk factors. The current body of evidence does not support a low-dairy diet to manage acne. Instead, the American Academy of Dermatology encourages a balanced diet that contains all food groups.



**Lactose:** Lactose intolerance could be a concern for some teens. There are many lactose-free dairy milk options on the market — it's real milk with all the same nutrients, just without the lactose. Many teens with lactose intolerance can still tolerate some lactose in their diet. For example, cheese is naturally lower in lactose, and yogurt may also be easier to digest.

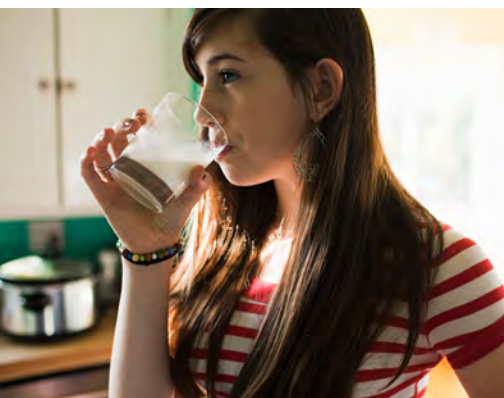


### Recommended Daily Dairy Servings



**3 servings**

*See backside for what counts as a serving of dairy. There are a variety of ways to enjoy milk, cheese and yogurt to meet the recommended daily servings.*





## Try this Recipe

Get creative with this classic pizza recipe by encouraging teens to top with their favorite veggies.



### Grilled Pizzas Made with No-Yeast Greek Yogurt Pizza Dough

Makes 4 servings

#### Ingredients:

- 2 cups self-rising flour
- 1 cup Greek yogurt
- ¼ cup cornmeal
- Shredded cheese
- Tomato sauce
- Sliced & diced veggies of choice

#### Instructions:

1. Place a pizza stone in the center of gas grill or oven and preheat to 450 degrees Fahrenheit (230 degrees Celsius).
2. Combine flour and Greek yogurt in a large bowl, stirring with a fork until a rough dough begins to form. Turn the mixture out onto a floured work surface and knead, adding additional flour as needed, until the dough becomes smooth and elastic, about 8 minutes.
3. Divide the dough in half to create two balls. Place one ball on a floured work surface and use a rolling pin to roll the dough into a 10-inch disk.
4. Dust a pizza paddle or a cookie sheet with a generous amount of cornmeal, then transfer dough on top.
5. Top dough with tomato sauce and add cheese, leaving a half inch border around the edge, followed by veggie toppings of choice.
6. Carefully slide pizza from pizza paddle (or cookie sheet) onto preheated pizza stone in the center of grill (or oven). Close the lid and cook until the crust is golden and the cheese is bubbling, 8 to 10 minutes.
7. Transfer pizza to cutting board. Rest pizza for 5 minutes before slicing. Repeat process with second dough ball.

#### Sources:

1. Parajuli J, Prangthip P. Adolescent Nutrition and Health: a Critical Period for Nutritional Intervention to Prevent Long Term Health Consequences. *Curr Nutr Rep.* 2025;14(1):116. Published 2025 Oct 23. doi:10.1007/s13668-025-00706-4
2. U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Agriculture. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025–2030.* <https://cdn.realfood.gov/DGA.pdf>
3. Rizzoli R. Dairy products, yogurts, and bone health123. *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.* 2014;99(5):1256S-1262S. doi: 10.3945/ajcn.113.073056



## Make Every Bite & Sip Count



Nutrient-rich foods can get lost in refrigerator drawers. Try leaving ready-to-eat cheese sticks or drinkable yogurts next to cleaned and prepped vegetables and fruits in high-traffic areas of the refrigerator. Teens will be more likely to see them quickly and grab a healthy snack on their way out the door or for a homework break.



Teens have packed schedules and may need a hand thinking ahead for healthy choices – whether in the lunchroom, on the field or out with friends. Designate a meal prep day to cook together and help them understand nutrition labels on their favorite foods.

### What Counts as a Serving of Dairy?

	<b>Milk: 1 cup</b>
	<b>Lactose-free Milk: 1 cup</b>
	<b>Yogurt: ¾ cup</b>
	<b>Kefir: 1 cup</b>
	<b>American Cheese: 1 oz</b>
	<b>Shredded Cheese: ¼ cup</b>
	<b>Hard Cheese: 1 oz</b>
	<b>Ricotta Cheese: ¼ cup</b>
	<b>Cottage Cheese: ½ cup</b>
	<b>Fortified Dairy Alternatives: 1 cup</b>

Serving sizes are based on the *Daily Servings by Calorie Level* supplement to the *2025-2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the Reference Amounts Customarily Consumed* as defined by the Food and Drug Administration.

4. Hess JM, Cifelli CJ, Fulgeni III VL. Energy and Nutrient Intake of Americans according to Meeting Current Dairy Recommendations. *Nutrients.* 2020;12(10):3006. doi:10.3390/nut12103006
5. Reynolds RV, Yeung H, Cheng CE, et al. Guidelines of care for the management of acne vulgaris. *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology.* 2024;90(5):1006.e1–1006.e30. doi:10.1016/j.jaad.2023.12.017

Milk, yogurt and cheese are nutrient-dense foods that can help nourish people throughout life. Dairy foods, including lactose-free varieties, are nutritious and accessible options that can help fill nutrient gaps and contribute to healthy eating patterns. To learn more about how dairy foods help people thrive across the lifespan, visit [USDairy.com](https://usdairy.com).