



FOOD TRENDS  
PERSONAL STORY 

# How To Get A Teenager To Eat Healthy (From An Actual Teenager)

Written by  
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May 11, 2018

I'm 16, and I first got into healthy eating when I was 9, after being mysteriously sick every day for six months. I tried going gluten-free to see if it would help, and felt a ton better. Going off gluten was just the beginning of my healthy eating adventure. I fell in love with cooking myself wholesome food and constantly learning about the newest ways to eat even better. I've found that for us teens (and for everyone, really), eating healthily can be affordable, socially acceptable, and easy. Here's are a few of the biggest myths about eating healthy as a teenager:

## 1. Myth: My friends will only accept me if I eat "normally."

Reality: A lot of my classmates (and strangers!) at school have asked why I eat the way I do. Just the other day, I was dipping bell peppers in hummus during English class, and someone asked what I was doing. Now, I don't know if he said this because we're not supposed to eat in English class or because my peppers were so exciting. Either way, rather than feel offended by his question, I took it as a compliment and an opportunity to tell him exactly what I was eating and why. I explained to him (and my other classmates who'd begun listening) that I was eating the bell peppers for a good dose of fiber and the hummus because it has protein and vitamins. They were intrigued! Ever since that day, my English class peers have come up to me to ask about healthy food and what they should be eating. Not only did my classmates accept me even though I ate weird foods, but they were actually interested in learning more!

## 2. Myth: It's impossible to stay healthy at school.

Reality: It does take time and a little planning to make yourself wholesome school lunches, but it's doable! And the added effort is so worth it. I like to make a lot of food on Sunday night and then portion it out throughout the week. My weekly lunch prep go-to's are: roasting sweet potatoes, bell peppers, celery, and tomatoes; blanching whole collard green leaves (great for all kinds of wraps!); [making a batch of chocolate muffins](#); baking a batch of granola. Some of my favorite school lunches to make are collard wraps with roasted veggies and turkey, tuna salad, greens with chicken and roasted veggies, and leftovers from dinner. If you're vegetarian or vegan, you can use lots of hummus, beans, and nuts. Making your staples at the beginning of the week is not only time-efficient, but it also takes away all the stress of having to plan meals for school last-minute.

### **3. Myth: Healthy food is too expensive.**

Reality: Actually, the amount of processed snack food per ounce that will fill you up is more expensive than real, unprocessed food. Things like walnuts, coconut chips, almonds, fresh strawberries, and avocado are cheaper than buying that much protein in Doritos.

My favorite snack hack is taking advantage of the bulk bins in health food stores (such as Whole Foods). They have nuts, seeds, and dried fruits at way better prices than the packaged versions. I love eating nuts and seeds for a quick, protein-filled snack. This is a great way to buy them.

Meat and eggs are great sources of protein and fat (if you eat meat). Keep in mind that you don't have to buy organic everything, because—let's be real—it can get ex-pen-sive! Only buy what you can afford. If you're on a budget, try to buy antibiotic-free meat. If you can spend a little more money, go organic. And if you can, buy grass-fed/pasture-raised! And the same goes for vegetables and fruits. Get "conventional" if that's what you can afford. Eating regular fruits and veggies, even if they have pesticides, is so much better than not eating them at all!

### **4. Myth: I just can't give up sweets.**

Reality: By eating real food, you never have to give up sweets. A lot of my happiness in life comes from making and eating healthier versions of my favorite treats. Just swap in whole food ingredients like almond flour, coconut oil, real

eating healthier versions of my favorite treats: just swap in whole food ingredients like almond flour, coconut oil, real maple syrup, and cacao powder, so the results are all low in sugar and chock-full of protein—but still super delicious! Some of my favorites are [chocolate cake](#), "[pop-tarts](#)," and [chocolate chip cookies](#).

## 5. Myth: I won't be able to hang with my friends if I can't eat normal food.

Reality: Among a lot of teens, there is a social norm of eating unhealthily. Grabbing fast food for lunch is a social event and a way to connect! A lot of times, I've been turned off by the prospect of eating healthily because I've been worried that it will ruin my social experience.

Luckily, you don't have to sacrifice your fun social time by eating real food! You can still go to all those fun places to hang out with friends. Just eat something filling beforehand (like a low-sugar smoothie full of protein, chia seed pudding, or some power balls). Then when you're all hanging out at the fast food place, you can order a salad or some sweet potato fries and enjoy the social aspects of hanging out, minus the junk food. If any of your friends say, "Why are you getting a salad?" you can respond, "I already ate, so I just wanted something light." Boom, easy-peasy!

## 6. Myth: If I start eating healthy, I'll never be able to eat unhealthy again.

Reality: Not at all! If you really want to eat a food that's not "healthy" at some point, enjoy it with zero guilt. A lot of people worry about eating "cheat" foods. But the truth is, if you're eating real, whole food most of the time, having not-so-healthy foods once in a while is not going to affect you much (unless you're allergic). It's more important to fully appreciate those treats when you do occasionally have them rather than stressing over it!

*Want to eat more plant-based meals this year? [Here's exactly what to do](#).*

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