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Improving Teenage Nutrition

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TO IMPROVE TEENAGE NUTRITION

This booklet is for leaders of youth programs or others interested in the health and well being of teenagers.

Its purpose is two-fold:

1. To help you recognize the need to improve teenage nutrition.
2. To help you plan ways to improve the nutrition of all teenagers.

How do we know about the health of our teenagers?

- Weights and measurements.
- A doctor's examination.
- A dentist's examination.
- Tests for physical fitness.
- Research studies on diets and food habits.

Improving Teenage Nutrition

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We like to think we're well-fed in America. And we are, compared to people in many countries. But, although good food is abundant, many teenagers need improved diets. This is confirmed by much research on the nutritional status of teenagers. Studies consistently show that:

- The older the child, the poorer the diet. The percentage of young people with poor diets increases sharply from childhood to teenage.
- The teenage girl is the poorest fed member of the family.
- The nutrients most commonly lacking in diets are calcium and vitamin C. Vitamins A, thiamine, and riboflavin are low in diets in some sections of the country. Iron is often low in the diet of the teenage girl.
- Obesity and overweight is a pressing problem among teenagers.

Even though the teenage girl is the poorest fed member of the family, teenage boys also need to improve their diets. Since teenage boys and girls are interested in each other and in doing things together, it is more effective to carry on nutrition programs with a joint approach.

The fewer calories you eat, the more important it is to make all of them count. Foods with "empty calories" often replace foods with important nutrients. For teenagers especially, foods high in sugar and fat often replace those with more-needed protein, minerals, and vitamins.

Teenagers see their diet problems as:

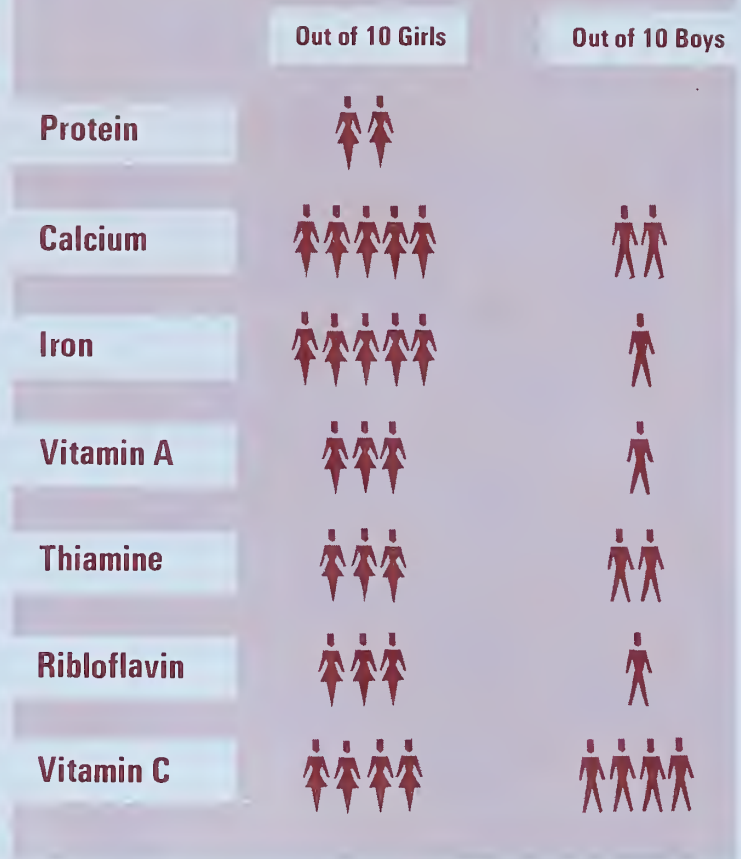
- Skipping meals—particularly breakfast.
- Inadequate planning of family meals.
- Lack of participation as a family at mealtime.
- Poor selection of snacks.
- Fad diets.
- Not enough time to eat meals.

Some Facts

Girls are more poorly fed than boys. Five out of every 10 girls, and 2 out of every 10 boys, get less than two-thirds of the daily calcium recommended by the National Research Council. Vitamin C is the only nutrient in which the same number of girls and boys are low. Girls are often short of calcium and iron as well. Boys lack calcium and thiamine.

Six of every 10 girls and 4 of every 10 boys have poor diets. That is, they get two-thirds or less of the nutrients recommended for their age by the National Research Council. These findings come from the Cooperative Nutritional Status Studies in the 11 western States. Seven-day diet records were collected from about 800 boys and girls, age 13-15 years.

Need Better Diets



These Have Poor Diets

Out of 10 Girls



Out of 10 Boys



Why Are Teenagers Poorly Fed?

They skip breakfast. Why? They spend extra time dressing and must rush to catch the bus. They stay out late at night and oversleep. Breakfast is not ready and they do not have time to prepare it. Girls believe that eating breakfast will make them fat. Studies show that skipping breakfast is more common in the teenage girl than the teenage boy.

They make a poor selection of snacks. Studies made in Iowa show that one-fourth of a teenager's calories come from snacks. This is equivalent to one meal. Empty calories—foods made up chiefly of fat, sugar, and starches—have small amounts of vitamins, minerals, and protein in proportion to the calories.

Since the teenage girl needs only 2400 calories, this is more serious than for a boy needing 3600 calories. If she consumes a high proportion of empty calories, it is difficult for

her to select other foods that provide the nutrients she needs.

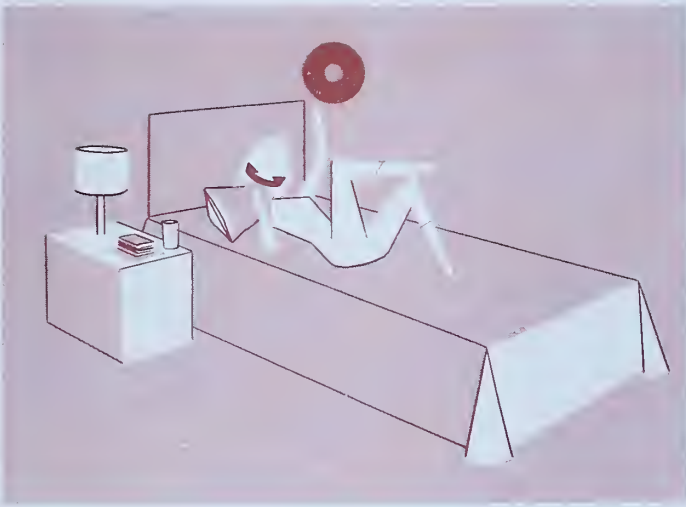
They no longer drink milk or they don't drink a sufficient amount. Insufficient calcium was reported in 5 out of 10 of the girls and 2 out of 10 of the boys in the Western States study. The teenagers may refuse to drink milk because they think it is childish or are afraid it will make them fat. Girls are much concerned with getting fat.

The teenage girl fears fat. It isn't only the fat girl who worries about getting fat. She may not be as afraid as the thinner girl. This fear is supported to some extent by fact. More older girls are overweight than younger girls. Nineteen percent of Iowa girls aged nine were overweight. This increased to 44 percent of the 16-year-olds. In Oregon, about 39 percent and in Washington and Maine 25 percent of the 16-year-old girls were overweight. Sometimes this corrects itself as the adolescent body readjusts, but the amount of overweight is far too high.

Why they are not well-fed



- SKIP BREAKFAST
- EAT POOR SNACKS
- DRINK NO MILK
- FEAR FAT



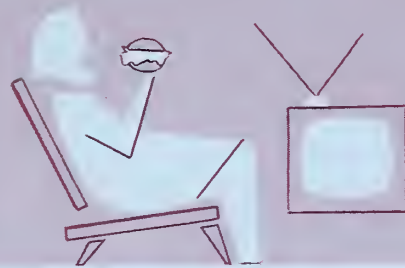
More Teenage Girls Than Boys Are Overweight

In Oregon, about 39 percent of the 16-year-old girls were overweight as compared with 29 percent of boys the same age. A study in Maine showed 30 percent of the 15-year-old girls and 10 percent of the boys were overweight. In Iowa, 44 percent of the girls were overweight as compared with about 19 percent of the boys aged 16. Even though it is less of a problem with boys, overweight is a problem with far too many teenagers.

Teenage girls need 2400–2600 calories—teenage boys, 3100–3600, according to the National Research Council's recommended daily dietary allowances. Since the girl needs about one-third fewer calories than the teenage boy, she cannot eat as often, or as much, as he does without gaining weight. She needs to understand nutrition so she can get a good diet and at the same time keep her calories down.



Which you are...



DEPENDS ON BALANCE OF

CALORIES

ACTIVITY

Activity In Weight Control

Calories are only one part of the weight control picture; activity is the other. When your calories and activities balance, your weight remains steady. If your activities are greater than the calories, you lose weight. If you take in more calories than you need for your activities, you gain weight.

An Iowa study indicates that the overweight girls actually ate fewer calories than girls of normal weight. In fact the "overweighters" diet was poorer in many respects. They drank less milk.

Overweight girls tend to sit more. They do not enjoy active sports, dancing and physical activities, so their actual calorie needs are less. If their physical activities call for fewer calories, they will actually gain weight on what might be a normal diet for an active girl.

If calories and activities balance, you'll neither gain nor lose weight. This is important to remember when planning a recreation program with teenagers.

Motivating Teenagers

Before we can motivate teenagers to improve their nutrition, we must first understand them. Second, we must base our approach on their needs and wants, or we aren't going to get through to them. Third, and most important, we must involve the teenagers in solving their own problem.

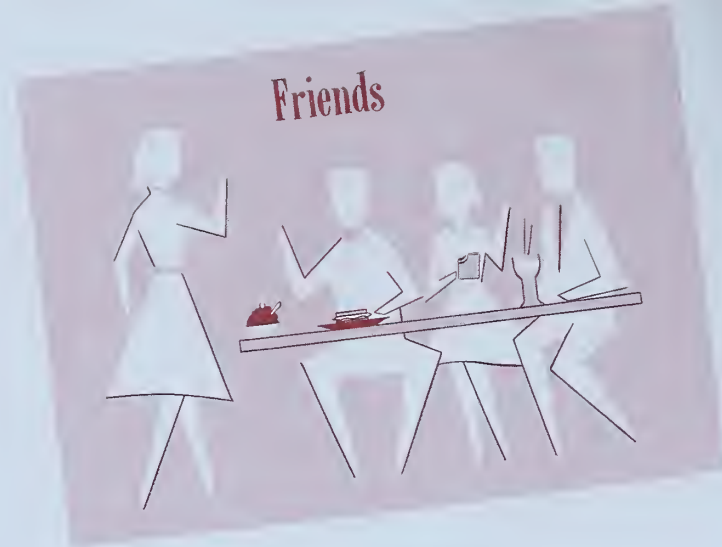
Certainly no adult can solve the problem of teenage nutrition. We can give facts on the importance of good nutrition and what makes up a balanced diet, but in the end the decision to practice good nutrition is up to the teens themselves.

Let us look at a few of the things that are important to almost all teenagers and see how they are related to food and nutrition.

Friends. The teenager wants his peer group to like him. In our culture, we share food and drink with our friends. The teenager is no different. It is the snacks he eats with friends at the corner drugstore or the drive-in that may make the difference between eating empty calories or getting needed nutrients. If one-fourth of his calories are from snacks, he needs to select wisely from the foods available. If we can motivate teenage leaders to choose wisely, they in turn will do much to motivate the others to eat better balanced diets.

Sociability. The teenager wants to be with others of his age group. At most social affairs, food and drinks are served. Teenage leaders can make it "the thing to do" to serve fruit juice and other nutrition foods at parties, dances, and barbecues.

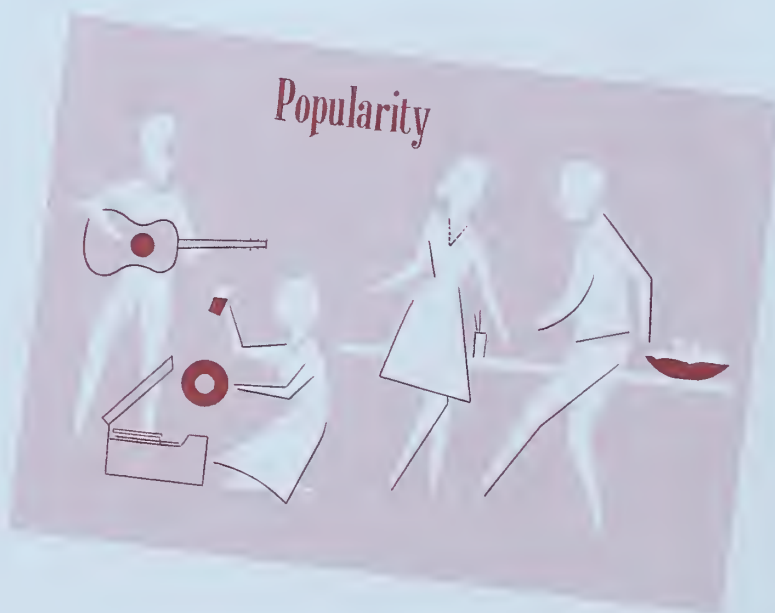
Appearance. The teenager needs to know how nutrition contributes to shiny hair, clear skin, good posture, and, of course, correct weight.



By convincing the teenager of the relationship between appearance and nutrition, we can often help motivate him to improve his diet.

Vigor. It is not just the player on the field or the cheerleaders who want pep and energy. Teenagers admire others with vigor and want it for themselves. They do not always connect lack of energy with poor nutrition. We can help them see this relationship.

Popularity. Teenagers want to be popular—perhaps with just the right group—or with a small group—but they want to be popular. The person they most admire is not a TV or movie star but usually a member of the peer group who is popular. He may be the class president or an outstanding athlete or student, but in all probability he has good health. If we are to motivate teenagers to better food habits, we need to show them how good nutrition helps them have pep, energy, and good looks.



TEACHING AIDS

This material will help you get the story of nutrition across to teenagers.

Books

- "Teaching Nutrition," Mattie Pattison, Helen Barbour, and Ercel Eppright. The Iowa State College Press, Ames.
- "Food Becomes You," Ruth Leverton. A Dolphin Handbook, Doubleday and Company, Garden City, N.Y. (Paperback)
- "Nutrition in a Nutshell," Roger J. Williams. A Dolphin Book, Doubleday and Company, Garden City, N.Y. (Paperback)
- "Nutrition in Action," Ethel Austin Martin. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York.
- "Nutrition Education in Action" (A Guide for Teachers), Ethel Austin Martin. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York.
- "Food—The Yearbook of Agriculture, 1959." U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.
- "The Nuts Among The Berries," Ronald M. Deutsch. Balentine Books, Inc., New York.
- "Better Homes and Gardens Nutrition For Your Family." Meridith Publishing Company.
- "Health and Safety for Teenagers." Scott, Forsman and Company, Chicago.

Pamphlets

- "Personality Plus Through Diet." The Nutrition Foundation, Inc., Public Affairs Pamphlets, 22 East 38th, New York.
- "A Girl and Her Figure" and "A Boy and His Physique." National Dairy Council, 111 North Canal Street, Chicago.
- "How Your Body Uses Food," Albert Piltz. National Dairy Council, Chicago.
- "The Wonder of You" and "Food and You." American Institute of Baking, 400 East Ontario Street, Chicago.
- "Selected Programs for Improving Teenage Nutrition." Ext. Serv. Cir. 554, USDA, Washington, D.C.

Films

- "It's All in Knowing How." National Dairy Council, 111 North Canal Street, Chicago, Ill.
- "The Beauty Habit." Florida Citrus Commission, Lakeland, Fla.
- "Why Eat a Good Breakfast." Cereal Institute, 135 South Lasalle Street, Chicago, Ill.
- "Losing to Win." Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., 1 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y.



Ways To Emphasize Teenage Nutrition

Interest The Community

Provide an opportunity for young people to learn the nutrition situation and how their families plan to meet their food needs.

Give teenagers a chance to help plan for community betterment and to give demonstrations, make surveys, build exhibits.

Have young people help provide and serve tasty and nutritious food for community functions.

Involve Others

Involve professional people. Enlist the cooperation of school, medical, dental, and public health groups in planning and conducting a teenage nutrition program. Capitalize on present interest in science. Have doctors and outstanding scientists explain the long-time effects of good nutrition.

Involve parents, homemakers' clubs, and industrial groups. Ask food markets to provide space for teenagers to present nutrition exhibits. Have homemakers' clubs help secure leadership for groups. Invite sponsors to meal preparation activities or achievement programs. Have teens demonstrate before homemakers and civic groups.

Train Adults Who Work With Youth

Urge them to make more nutrition information available in all youth activities.

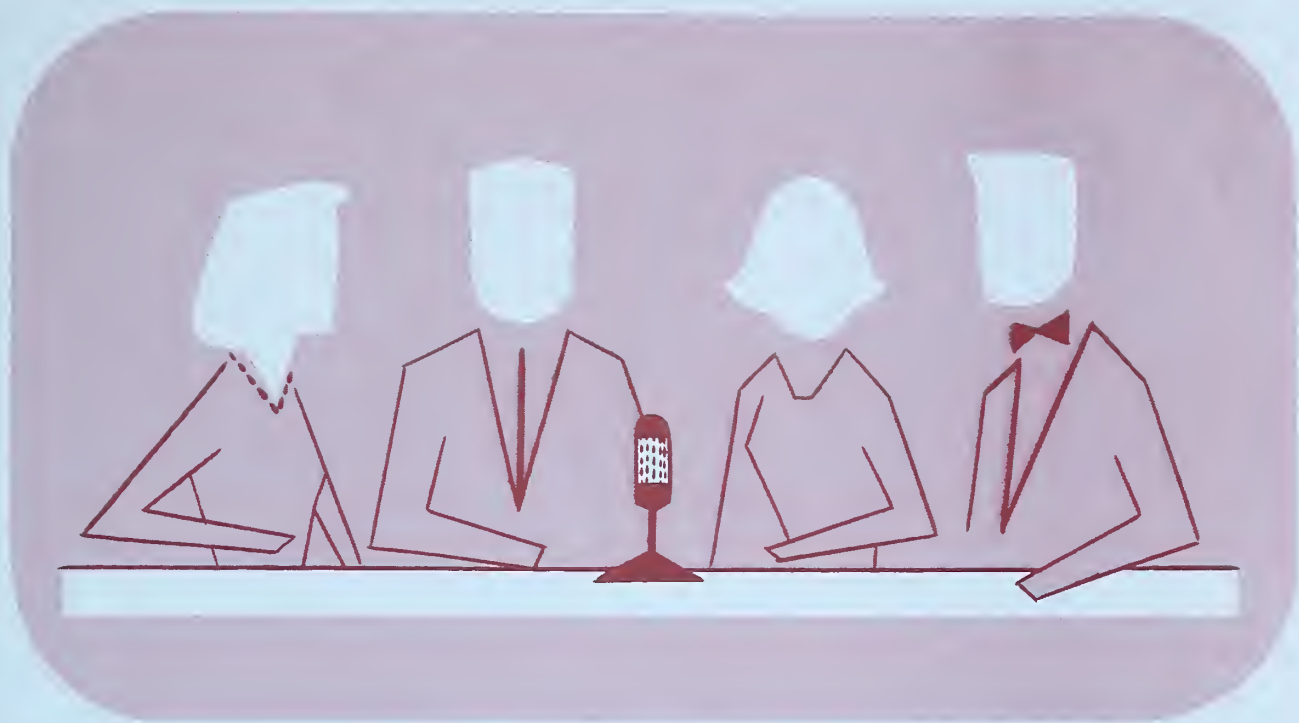
Help them with methods for presenting nutrition information at meetings.

Suggest ways teenagers can influence their families and communities.

Hold Workshops (two approaches)

Teaching nutrition. How to work with teenagers. Nutrition needs of teenagers. Methods to use. Demonstrate and evaluate—visual aids, discussion tools, skits, demonstrations.

Meal preparation. Demonstrate and encourage group participation in planning, preparing, and serving a simple meal which fits into a good daily food consumption pattern. Emphasize foods that are nutritious, tasty, economical. Encourage leaders to conduct the same type of work meeting in their local groups, being sure everyone participates. Whichever method you use, ask participants to evaluate the workshop—the learning—the interest—the help given others.



Make Use Of Camps

Serve nutritionally adequate food at camps. Have a nutritionist help with menus. Plan attractive food service at camp to create a pleasant atmosphere. Encourage all members to try the nutritious foods served. Provide for nutritious snacks—apples, milk. Control the sale of candy and carbonated beverages, particularly at night.

Train camp counselors and junior leaders in the above teaching procedures.

Provide cookouts as an opportunity for teaching nutrition.

Plan nutrition discussions with trained resource personnel. Emphasize the food needs of the particular area, for example, foods high in vitamin C.

Provide nutrition study for both boys and girls.

Schedule opportunity for physical checkups to indicate nutritional, dental, and posture conditions. Use a take-home checksheet.

Emphasize teenage participation. If possible, have teenagers involved in planning as well as carrying out the programs.

Include suggestions for improvements and ideas for further use of nutrition information.

Hold Science Fairs

Encourage use of nutrition experiments, demonstrations, and exhibits:

- Animal feeding experiments—carry these out with professional guidance. After deficiency is demonstrated, bring the animals back to as near normal condition as possible.
- Simple nutrition surveys—useful to get interest and as a basis for programs.
- Study of specific nutrient such as vitamin C.

Give Demonstrations

Show-and-tell presentations are favorite methods with many youth groups. They work well for both regular meetings and public or mass media situations.

Present Favorite Food Shows

Display and explain a food in relation to a full day's menu. Give the food values of each dish prepared.

Use Publicity

Mass media are dependable channels for extending nutrition information to all teenagers. Newspapers, radio, TV, films, visual aids and similar methods reach wide audiences at one time. Use them fully!

Make exhibits, displays, and posters—encourage young people to develop posters. Show that nutrition is basic to pep, energy, good looks, and good physique. In exhibits for a business establishment, tie a nutrition idea to the business. Examples: bank—invest in good nutrition; lumber yard—building materials for good health. Place posters in county offices; local, county, and State fairs; store windows; school bulletin boards and lunchrooms; community meeting rooms; doctors' and dentists' offices. Take advantage of national dates and events such as 4-H Club Week, Health Week, Better Breakfast Week, and Dairy Month to make and use exhibits and posters.

Write news articles—special nutrition stories (personal accomplishment, project activity and community activities), some authored by teenagers; stories about local nutrition activities; series of articles for teenagers about nutrition; and editorials. Talk with editors about teenage nutrition and what might be done. Check with persons who have regular columns.

Use radio and TV—local shows and spot announcements; nutrition skits; teenage panels

interviewing experts (specialists, home economics agents, doctors, dentists, local leaders, dietitians); and TV series on basic nutrition.

Take Tours

Look for ways processors and markets protect nutrition or use methods of teaching families about food choices. Go to food manufacturing or processing plants, markets, health or nutrition agencies.

Make Tapes

Use a tape recording to bring a vital message from a busy person who cannot come to a youth meeting.

Tape and analyze viewpoints of a particular class of individuals such as homemakers, high school freshmen, athletes. Be sure to ask thoughtful questions if you want meaningful answers.

Use taped accounts of nutrition experiences for radio programs and meetings.

Dramatize

Informal plays, skits, puppet shows and role-playing are all instructional aids. Young people may act out a situation that is creating a nutrition problem. These teenager-produced dramatizations are opportunities for the producers to learn even more than the audience.

Program Guidelines

The Program

Be sure the program is meaningful and educational. This age group is interested in purposeful activities; they are not fooled by empty programs. Don't forget that teaching nutrition is your basic concern.

Give teenagers leeway to use their imagination and creativeness and allow much freedom in planning. Provide outlines, suggestions, and references and let members fill in with information from bulletins, magazines, cookbooks.

Make the program fun and different. You will be competing with many other programs. Yours will have to stand on its own feet.

Try to broaden the horizons of teenagers. Introduce new foods, take them to new places, let them try new ventures in food preparation and entertaining.

Make nutrition vital. Put life into your presentation of subject matter. Use interesting techniques, catchy titles; capitalize on teens' enthusiasm.

The Counselor

Choose leaders or counselors (a better term) for this group with great care. They should help the young people develop leadership. A man and woman counselor for each group is desirable. They should be receptive to ideas but firm in handling the group. They should have the respect of the group. The teenagers

themselves should be consulted in selecting their counselors.

Don't preach! Young people are likely to resent being told what is "good for them." They are interested in facts. Tell them facts, guide them, but let them draw their own conclusions.

The Teenagers

Recognize the importance of boy-girl relations. Include experiences that will have meaning and be of interest to both.

Provide opportunities for individuals who want to specialize in a subject. Some will want to work out scientific experiments and exhibits.

Some may want to develop proficiency in a line such as international foods.

Remember this is an exploratory age group. Do not be strictly tied by tradition. Adventure, inspire, challenge.

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HOW EFFECTIVE IS YOUR PROGRAM?

- Does nutrition interest the teenagers?
- Do they think that nutrition is important to them, now?
- Are they aware of the long-time effects of good nutrition?
- Is your nutrition program available to boys as well as girls?
Do boys participate in it?
- Do you involve young people in planning your nutrition program?
- Do you involve other professional people in your program?
. . . business men, doctors, dentists, teachers, school lunch officials.
- Do you set a good example?

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