

# Eating Healthy as a Teenager With Cystic Fibrosis



Balancing school and a social life with your daily cystic fibrosis care can be overwhelming — especially when you add managing nutrition to the list. But when you know how food, enzymes, and supplements can help you feel more energetic and strong, balancing life with CF can be easier.

## WHAT ARE MY BMI GOALS?

The answer depends on your current weight, height, and the **nutritional goals** that you and your CF care team set for your health.

To set and track these goals, your **CF dietitian** will look at how well you are growing and can compare your body mass index (BMI) to that of others your age and gender to help you understand what “percentile” you may be in. BMI is calculated by dividing your weight in kilograms (kg) by your height in meters squared ( $m^2$ ).

The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation recommends that for people under age 21, BMI should be at or above the 50th percentile based on a 2008 study where lung function was found to be better in adolescents with CF who had a BMI within this range.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, there are other aspects of nutrition that are very important.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

A better BMI is associated with better lung function, which is key for helping teens with CF stay healthy and energized. **Daily calorie needs** are higher for teens with CF, and the best way to meet them is with a healthy diet rich in **protein**, fat (which is important for a healthy brain, skin, nails, and hair), and **salt**.

Many teens also take **enzymes** with meals and snacks and **vitamin supplements** to help their bodies absorb the nutrients they need to stay healthy.

Being body conscious is normal, so let your CF care team know if you’re worried that these recommendations may cause you to gain too much weight or lead to an unhealthy diet. Remember, what



you eat is as important as how much you eat. Partner with your CF dietitian to find healthy options to meet your goals.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Aim for three meals and two to three snacks at regular times during the day.
2. Add healthy fat to meals such as butter, olive oil, creamy dressings, avocados, and nut butters.
3. Choose high-calorie beverages like whole milk with cream, smoothies made with nut butter, or nutritional supplement drinks.
4. If pancreatic enzymes are prescribed, take them as recommended with meals and snacks to absorb fat, protein, and nutrients.
5. Eat meals with your family whenever possible to support each other in healthy eating habits.
6. Learn to cook new things.
7. A **feeding tube** can make it easier to get in extra calories and nutrients, particularly at night.

<sup>1</sup>Stallings VA, Stark LJ, Robinson KA, et al. Evidence-based practice recommendations for nutrition-related management of children and adults with cystic fibrosis and pancreatic insufficiency: results of a systematic review. *J Am Diet Assoc.* 2008; 108(5):832-839.