

TACKLING The TEENS

Women pass through three very important phases in their lives which are almost akin to rebirth. In a three-part series, we begin by looking at the nutritional needs of a girl attaining puberty.

By **DR PRIYADARSHANI KAMAT**

For centuries a woman has been told she is an abala which translates to 'weak one'. Now let us just add some strength to this abala and make her sabala – the strong one.

It's only a woman who can withstand 'three rebirths' gracefully and move on. And through this, if supported by a confident man, she comes out a winner.

So what are these three rebirths? Puberty, pregnancy and lactation, and menopause. And during these phases, she plays the role of a daughter, mother and grandmother. She nurtures, nourishes, encourages and very often just listens.

Since I am a holistic practitioner, I am going to take a closer look at the nutritional aspect which can add the S-factor, ie the strength to our wonder woman.

So why do we call these milestones rebirth? That's because her anatomy, physiology, psychology, in fact the essential perspective of a woman changes in and through these milestones.

So then let us approach the first rebirth. Get ready, your lovely little angel is now going to take you through the roller coaster of your life, the 'teen' years by reaching puberty. It is truly a tumultuous ride of hormones, both for you and for her. The estrogen and the progesterone secretions have started. Her primary sexual character starts to develop. The uterus and the ovaries develop. Ovulation and menstruation begins. Secondary sexual characters such as the breast and pubic hair also start developing. The growth spurt begins. Suddenly there is a need for questioning everything that is taught, of rebelling, of identity endorsement. Peers take precedence over the parents. Step back, make space. Take a deep breath and enjoy the ride.

But this is also the age when the foundation of a good health is laid. Calcium, protein and iron are three essential cornerstones of this foundation.



CALCIUM

Maximum calcium absorption happens up to the early 20s. This is a very small time period to pack a lifetime worth of calcium. Some of the major sources of calcium are leafy vegetables, sprouted beans, oatmeal, almond and figs. However, there is a little trick here: Vitamin D and exercise are needed for optimum absorption. Thus more outdoor activity plus walks in the sun for mother-daughter bonding should be encouraged.

PROTEIN

These are the building blocks of muscles, tissues and organs in the body. They are responsible for growth spurt. And some of the richest sources of protein are:

- * Beans – these when sprouted also give you Vitamin B12. Sprouting is very easy in a hot and humid country like Singapore.
- * Soy bean – remember to use in moderation due to the controversial phytoestrogen
- * Nuts - almonds, macadamia ,pecan, walnuts, hazelnuts
- * Seeds – such as sunflower pumpkin and flaxseeds
- * Sesame - is also high in calcium but is equally high in phytoestrogen hence needs to be used in moderation. For those of us who come from India, remember grandma's advice of eating only a few til ladoos (sesame sweet balls) during winter months. Well there is an element of truth in it.

IRON

This is very important element. It helps to carry O2 to the growing muscles and brain. Also helps in replenishing blood lost during menstruation. But the trick in this case is Vitamin C too is needed for maximum absorption.

ABC JUICE (APPLE, BEETROOT, CARROT)

INGREDIENTS:

- **APPLE:** 1 cup
- **CARROT:** 1 cup
- **BEETROOT:** Half cup

Method:

If you are using non-organic products, peel the carrots, beetroots and apples, since the peel retains maximum pesticides. Otherwise wash clean in running water.

Put the ingredients in a juicer. Serve immediately, half-an-hour before dinner or drink on an empty stomach in the morning.

HEALTH BENEFITS:

Rich source of iron, calcium and vitamin C.



Some of the important sources of iron are:

- * Beetroot, spinach, asparagus, lettuce, broccoli
- * Cocoa, seaweed, jaggery
- * Black grapes, raisins, dates

Sources of vitamin C are:

- * Citrus fruits – lemons, melons, strawberries, guava, kiwi
- * Orange yellow veggies like red peppers, carrots and pumpkins

Some other elements that one needs to focus on during puberty are

- * Magnesium – very essential in controlling PMS (premenstrual syndrome). The major sources of magnesium are banana, brown rice, broccoli and nuts.
 - * Vitamin E – almond, sunflower seeds, pepper (red, yellow, green) and whole wheat.
 - * Vitamin B6 – pepper, potatoes (cooked with skin)
- Garlic - not only does it keep the vampires away but also helps in nerve development. It is also a great antioxidant.

I am sure you are wondering why I have not added milk, eggs poultry, or red meat on our list. That's because most of these products are factory farmed and hugely pumped with hormones, which definitely will interfere with the developing hormones of our pubertal princesses. So if you are privileged enough to have access to fresh organic meats, milk or eggs, you might want to go ahead and indulge.

Apart from nutrition, it is important to recognise the inner beauty in your daughter. Teach her to respect who she is and not run after figure fads. This will keep the vampires of anorexia and bulimia away. These horrible eating disorders sap our youngsters of their strength and vitality. 'Fit' should be the mantra, not thin.

So while you go on the roller coaster ride called puberty and try out some healthy recipes, watch out for the next column on pregnancy and lactation. ☑

DATE AND NUT BALLS

INGREDIENTS:

- **CRUSHED DATES:** 1 small bowl (de-seeded)
- **ROASTED SEEDS & NUTS:** 1 small bowl (crushed)

Method:

Mix the ingredients together and roll them into tiny balls

(For nuts and seeds powder: dry roast individually 50 grms each of almonds, pistachio, walnuts, pecan nuts, sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds. Let them cool and coarsely crush them in a blender.)

HEALTH BENEFITS:

Rich source of iron, calcium, proteins, vitamin E and magnesium.



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