

What **TWEENS** want and need

Thinking about food and nutrition for the millennial generation

- Child development experts refer to tweens (kids ages 8 to 12 - between childhood and adolescence) as **the role/rule stage**. Their needs and wants include acceptance, success, role enactment and rule learning. They are both reluctant and eager to leave their childhood (foods, toys, games, etc.) behind.
- Tweens want **acceptance** from peers, siblings and parents as they develop an adult self-image. Kids at this age are group-oriented and they tend to be conformists - as they explore social roles and peer relationships. This means that they will usually want to eat what the people around them are eating.
- During the tween stage, young people are beginning to develop their moral sense and values, lifelong rules for right and wrong, good and bad. As part of this process, they begin to identify with and to emulate **role models**. The health habits of important teens and adults can have a profound effect on tweens.
- **Cooperation** is another important need for tweens. They look for, and enjoy, opportunities to share and to interact with different groups in their community. Tweens like to volunteer - and can learn important lessons from working with seniors, younger children and people with disabilities.
- Another key issue for this betwixt and between generation is **control**. They want power over their environment as they learn how to make their own decisions. Parents, teachers and youth leaders can help by giving tweens lots of chances to practice making choices - like healthy food choices.
- **Sensory gratification** is very important to tweens. This means that the eye-appeal and the presentation of meals and snacks are important to them. They care about color, shape, smell, taste and texture - and about the packaging of food and beverages. Tweens want food that is fun to handle and to eat.
- Tweens like **humor** - what older folks sometimes think is the "dark side" of humor. They like slapstick - and often go for things that seem gross, violent and taboo to adults. Who do you think is the target market for food and beverage products like purple ketchup, pink margarine, extremo burritos and lizard's breath ice tea?
- If you want to know more about what's hot and what's not on the tween scene, online is the place to go. Here are a few websites designed for the tween psyche:
 - <http://www.foxkids.com/>
 - <http://www.sikids.com/>
 - <http://www.yahooligans.com/>
 - <http://yucky.kids.discovery.com/>

