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Thursday, Jun. 12, 2008

Kids: Watching What They Eat

By Jeremy Caplan

The U.S. is a nation of dietary extremes: even as a third of American teens are overweight, more than a million others suffer from undereating disorders. But sandwiched between those who eat far too much and those who voluntarily eat too little are millions of American teens in the moderate middle. Because their eating habits are varied and so difficult to study, it's easy to lose track of what's on their menus--but it's worth trying to find out. In a few years, those teens will be making food decisions not just for themselves but also for their own kids.

To get a snapshot of the choices they're making now, Time found three teens willing to let us glimpse a day in their lives, then reported back to Marion Nestle, professor of nutrition at New York University and author of *What to Eat*, for her opinion. There are worrisome signs in what we saw, but hopeful ones too. Teens, clearly, are aware of the epidemic of inactivity and excess calories threatening their generation and--now and then, at least--are trying to fight back.

For Jasmine Ledezma, 13, eating is often about speed. "There are days when I'm superhealthy," says the resident of Austin, Texas, "but then there are days when I'm in such a rush." When we caught up with her, Ledezma had her usual Lucky Charms for breakfast but barely touched the chicken-nugget lunch on her cafeteria tray before hustling off to recess. She and her family later ate a quick dinner at Burger King, which Ledezma says was a special treat.

Unlike Ledezma, Jacob Goddard, 13, has a diet few urban teens would recognize. A typical meal at his family's Montana ranch includes beef carved fresh from local cattle, served with homemade bread and garden-grown vegetables. "Our beef tastes better than what you get at the store," Goddard says proudly, "because it's not full of antibiotics and it's fed grass, not corn." We watched the homeschooled Goddard as he worked off calories wrestling calves on branding day.

Nicholas Richards, 14, started his day with a bowl of cereal and lunched on a bagel. Later the Californian stopped at 7-Eleven for another favorite, Gatorade. Richards likes helping in the kitchen, so he made himself a ham-

sandwich snack that afternoon and tossed the salad his family would have with pork loin for dinner.

Nestle, who's seen it all when it comes to American eating, was not appalled by any of this but wasn't satisfied either. "I would look for ways to introduce more fruits, whole grains and veggies into these diets," she says. That's not a suggestion adults always follow, never mind kids, but Nestle says parents should take the lead for all teens. She suggests they tweak their kids' diets by encouraging them to add fruit to their cereal, carrot sticks to their snacks and lettuce and tomatoes to their sandwiches.

Visit time.com/dailyfood to hear Jacob Goddard narrate a slide show about a day in his life

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