



Guidelines for Healthy Snacking

Snacks are an important part of a child's daily diet. Because they have smaller stomachs than adults, children need to eat more often. Allowing a child to have a small snack every 2½-3 hours is ideal, and the same is true for adolescents and teens. So what can you do to ensure your child gets satisfying snacks that provide the nutrition she or he needs? Take note of the following suggestions:

- Choose fresh, whole foods whenever possible. Most of the pre-packaged snacks found on grocery store shelves are highly processed and offer few nutrients in return. Fresh foods such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, meats and cheeses are the best sources for the nutrients children need.
- If you select a high-carbohydrate food as a snack, try to balance it with some healthy fat or protein. High-carbohydrate foods, when eaten alone, cause blood sugar to rise quickly and then crash down. The crash triggers a craving for another high-carb snack, which creates a vicious cycle of hunger. *Since the purpose of snacking is to satisfy hunger until the next meal, it's important to avoid these highs and lows by including adequate fat and protein with snacks.* Meat and fish, avocados, nuts, cheese, eggs, yogurt, hummus, and olive oil make good additions to high-carbohydrate snacks. For example:
 - Apple slices with cheddar cheese, almond butter or peanut butter
 - Slices of avocado wrapped in deli turkey
 - 100% whole wheat crackers (no hydrogenated oils) with cheese, tuna, or lox
 - Raisins and pecans, pistachios and dried cherries, or any fruit/nut combo
 - Veggie dippers with hummus, cream cheese, or ranch dressing (be careful- low fat dressings often contain more sugar)
 - A piece of fruit with a hard-boiled egg
 - Cottage cheese with melon cubes or canned peaches
 - Yogurt sprinkled with low-sugar cereal
 - Mashed avocado or guacamole with a few baked tortilla chips
- Low-calorie, low-fat, or 'lite' snacks are not necessarily healthy. For example:
 - The popular "100-Calorie Packs" are little more than processed white flour, which means they lack essential vitamins and minerals. Their lack of protein and small size makes them unsatisfying as well.
 - Pretzels and animal crackers are very high in refined carbohydrates and almost devoid of nutritional value. 100% whole grain pretzels may be a better option, but be sure to pair them with some protein or fat.
 - In general, granola bars and breakfast bars are extremely high in sugar. Some contain more sugar than the average candy bar, along with unhealthy trans fats. If your child insists on granola or breakfast bars, try to find a brand with under 4 grams of sugar and no hydrogenated oils.
 - Some low-fat yogurts, especially those marketed towards children, contain so much sugar that they'd be more appropriately labeled as desserts! Buy plain yogurt instead.





Ideas for Snacks from the Food Groups

- **Fruits and vegetables**

- ~ Fresh fruits and vegetables are excellent choices, and can be dipped in yogurt or ranch dressing.
- ~ Pickles and olives are healthier choices for salty snacks.
- ~ Unsweetened applesauce, canned fruit packed in juice, and small amounts of dried fruit with no added sugar are also good choices. Be careful with pre-packaged banana chips; they are usually deep fried in trans fat.
- ~ Remember, fruits and vegetables are digested very quickly and don't satisfy hunger for long. Add some protein or fat, such as yogurt or dip, with fruits and veggies.

- **Meats and protein**

- ~ Although it's received a bad reputation, beef jerky is actually a convenient, portable snack that offers satisfying protein. There are now brands available without MSG and sodium nitrate.
- ~ Hard-boiled eggs or deviled eggs are great options (it used to be thought that eggs raised cholesterol levels, but this has been shown to be untrue).
- ~ Slices of deli meat are nutritious and easy to pack.
- ~ Homemade bean dips are easy to prepare and contain satisfying fiber and protein.

- **Dairy**

- ~ String cheese and sliced deli cheeses are fun to eat and easy to pack.
- ~ Plain yogurt is low in sugar and goes well with fresh fruit. Cottage cheese is another good choice.

- **Grains**

- ~ When choosing crackers, look for a brand without hydrogenated oils. Ideally, the first ingredient listed should be whole grain.
- ~ Whole grain tortillas can be filled with cheese and salsa, hummus, bean dip, etc.
 - ~ Remember, whole grain is always healthier than white.

Key Points

- The best snacks are whole, fresh foods. Most pre-packaged snacks are expensive and have no nutrition.
- Including protein or fat with snacks will stave off hunger longer. Children need higher amounts of protein and fat for growth and development.
- Read food labels and try to avoid products that contain hydrogenated oils, added sugars, or corn syrup.
- Healthy snacking doesn't have to be all or nothing. Fun snacks like cookies and chips are perfectly OK every now and then.