

SUPER SNACKS

Children have high nutrient needs and small stomach capacities. Snacking can help children meet their needs for important nutrients like vitamins, minerals, and protein. Children also get calories needed for proper growth from snacks. Even overweight children may need to eat snacks.

It is convenient to offer children prepackaged snack items such as fruit roll-ups, prepackaged crackers, candy, cookies, popsicles, potato chips, etc. These foods are easily accessible and are especially attractive to children. Unfortunately, they may be excessively high in fat, sugar, salt, and calories. In addition, they contain “empty calories” because they are low in nutrients needed by children for proper growth. For the child who tends to be heavier than normal, such snacks may provide excess calories, making it difficult for the child to control his weight.

Juice is often offered to thirsty children, and it is often consumed in excess because most children enjoy its sweet taste. Too much juice can spoil mealtime appetites and provides extra calories with few nutrients. Frequently bathing the teeth with sugary juice can cause cavities. Excess juice intake can contribute to weight gain. Because of these potential problems, a limit of 4 oz. (1/2 cup) juice per day is suggested. Use only 100% fruit juice; avoid fruit “drinks” that contain a small amount of juice plus water and sweetener; this includes lemonade, iced teas, and sports drinks. Try to give a citrus juice (orange or grapefruit) to meet vitamin C needs. Consider diluting 4 oz. of juice with water in order to provide a more satisfying amount. Encourage your child to drink plain water when he/she is thirsty. Serving it with ice cubes or in a special cup or glass will make it more exciting and acceptable to the child.

Some simple rules for healthy snacking include:

- Plan snacks at regular times during the day. Two hours after a meal and two hours before the next meal is reasonable.
- Serve snacks that satisfy hunger but that do not spoil appetite for the next meal.
- Keep snacks relatively boring. If they are too exciting, children may eat more than what is needed to simply satisfy hunger.
- Choose healthful foods that contribute to daily food requirements from the food groups.
- Limit juice to ½ cup (4 oz.) per day. Use only 100% fruit juice.
- Avoid using food as a reward.

NOTE – For toddlers and pre-schoolers, choose snacks carefully to prevent choking. Avoid nuts, seeds, dried fruits, raw carrots, whole grapes and cherries, popcorn, etc. because they are difficult to chew and may cause choking.

DAIRY PRODUCTS

For children age 12-24 months, choose whole milk
For children over age two, choose low fat or nonfat dairy products.

- Milk
- cheese
- string cheese
- ricotta or cottage cheese
- Low sugar yogurt
- pudding

BREADS and CEREALS

- Whole wheat bread
- Whole grain tortillas or tortilla chips
- Whole grain crackers
- Whole grain dry cereals
- Rice cakes
- Whole grain pitas and bagels
- Air popped popcorn (older children)

LEAN PROTEINS

- lean meat or poultry cut in cubes or strips
- Fish (canned tuna, salmon, sardines, whitefish)
- hard boiled eggs
- nuts, seeds, “trail mix” (older children)
- peanut butter (can be mixed with raisins or spread on celery, bananas, apples, or crackers)
- Edamame beans, chickpeas or hummus spreads

FRUITS and VEGETABLES

- Dried fruits - apples, apricots, peaches, pears, dates, prunes, raisins, cranberries
- Fresh fruits – apples, bananas, peaches, nectarines, pears, orange and grapefruit sections, strawberries and grapes (cut in smaller pieces for small children)
- Carrot sticks, celery sticks (older children)
- Raw or steamed cauliflower, broccoli
- Bell pepper strips
- Grape and cherry tomatoes (cut in smaller pieces for small children)
- Fresh or frozen corn or peas
- Sliced cucumbers
- Avocado slices or chunks