

Nutrition Matters

Nutrition Services, Community and Health Services

Snacks that make the grade

Snack attack

Snack attacks are especially common for kids who need lots of energy from food to keep them going all day long. Children also have small stomachs, which mean they need to fill up more frequently. Snacks prevent kids from getting too tired and hungry between meals.

Healthy snacks are a snap



Snacks can be fun and healthy, depending on what foods you choose. Healthy snacks are packed with nutrients that help children to grow, learn and play.

Remember it's OK for kids to eat less healthy snacks every once in awhile, but many convenience foods contain too much fat, salt or sugar to be eaten as everyday snacks. Children who fill up on processed foods are missing the benefits and enjoyment of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and milk.

The best snacks include two of the four food groups from Canada's Food Guide.

Offer your kids a healthier option. For example, toss together a homemade trail mix instead of potato chips, freeze grapes for a sweet healthy alternative to candy or serve fruit topped with yogurt and a cherry rather than ice cream.

Smart snacking strategies

How can you encourage your children to enjoy healthy snacks? Try some of these tips:

- Plan ahead with your child. Consider their likes and dislikes. Keep in mind that you have a variety of choices within each food group.
- Shop together. Discuss with your child what foods make a healthy snack and ask them for suggestions of foods they would like to try.
- Stock up on “grab-and-go” foods such as crackers, yogurt tubes, and fruit. Look for foods that travel well, require little work to prepare and are easy to eat.
- Pack snacks in individual containers to help manage portion sizes. Snacking from a large box or bag can lead to mindless munching and eating beyond satisfying hunger.
- Team up in the kitchen. Spend some time with your children creating healthy after-school snacks for the week.
- Create a special area in the fridge for your children's snacks. Fill it with fun, tasty, nutritious foods and encourage children to select snacks from this section.
- Limit snacks to 2 or 3 times a day and serve small portions 2 hours before meals, so they don't interfere with their appetite.



Lip smacking snack ideas

- Air popped popcorn sprinkled with parmesan cheese
- Mini carrot, oatmeal or bran muffins and milk
- Apple slices sprinkled with cinnamon and cheese cubes
- Trail mix made with cereal and dried fruit
- Pizza slice and 100% juice
- Vegetable sticks and yogurt dip
- Cereal and milk
- Banana dipped in orange juice and rolled in granola
- Whole wheat tortilla or pita triangles with hummus
- Fruit chunks dipped in vanilla yogurt
- Bean burrito with cheese
- Yogurt mixed with cereal
- Fruit kabobs with cheese sticks
- Fruit smoothie (yogurt, fruit, juice or milk blended)
- ½ bagel with cream cheese and strawberries

Carolyn's Tried and True, Fast and Easy Muffins

Preheat oven to 375°F

- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1 cup wheat bran
- 2 tbsp wheat germ
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 egg
- ¼ cup oil
- ¾ cup buttermilk*
- 1 cup fruit (e.g., blueberries, mashed banana) optional



1. Mix together all dry ingredients.
2. Whisk together egg, oil and buttermilk.
3. Add buttermilk mixture to dry ingredients and stir until moistened.
4. Gently fold fruit into mixture.
5. Spoon into muffin tin and bake at 375°F for 12-15 minutes.

Yield: 8-12 muffins

Tip: Freeze to pack in your child's lunch.

*To make buttermilk, mix 1 tbsp lemon juice with 1 cup of milk. Allow to rest 10 minutes before using.

Caution Choking!

Small hard foods such as nuts and seeds or slippery foods like whole grapes or raisins can be choking hazards for children under four years of age. Remember to choose safe-to-eat snacks.

Yogurt Popsicles

- 2 cup lower-fat plain yogurt
- ½ cup frozen juice concentrate or puréed fruit
- 2 tsp sugar



1. Mix yogurt, juice concentrate or puréed fruit and sugar until smooth.
2. Pour into popsicle moulds and freeze solid.

To make puréed fruit, add fresh, canned or thawed frozen fruit to a blender. If a blender is not available, mash soft fruits and add them to the yogurt mixture.

Source: Cooking Healthy Together, Toronto Public Health, 1998.