

Smart Snacks

Most kids like to snack, and snacks can be good for you. Think of snacks as mini-meals that can provide the nutrients and energy your child needs to grow, play and learn. Without snacking, it may be difficult for active, young children to get enough nutrients to meet the needs of their growing bodies.



How many smart snacks does my child need?

Your child has a small stomach and probably eats less at meals than you do. Most young children do best when they have three meals and two to three snacks a day. Smart snacks between meals can help fill the gaps.

When should my child eat snacks?

Snacks served too closely to mealtime may affect your child's appetite. It's best to serve snacks one and a half to two hours before mealtimes so your child is hungry and ready to eat. Keep cups of water available but discourage full cups of milk or juice for an hour before meals.



What size snack does my child need?

Small snacks are best. Offer your child a small snack and let him or her ask for more if they are still hungry. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, a good guideline is that a toddler portion size should equal about a quarter of an adult portion size.

Should snacks be offered as rewards?

Offer snacks to satisfy hunger. Avoid giving food to reward behavior or to calm a child that is upset. This can lead to emotional eating later in life. Giving sweets, chips or soda as a reward often leads to children overeating foods that are high in sugar, fat and empty calories. Worse, it interferes with kids' natural ability to regulate their eating. It also encourages them to eat when they're not hungry to reward themselves.

Should junk foods be offered as snacks?

High fat, high salt and high sugar snacks provide calories, but usually offer few or no vitamins and minerals. Sodas, fruit punches, fruit juices that are not 100 percent juice, snack cakes, candies and chips should be limited in the diet. Eating too many of these foods can make your child overweight or spoil their appetite for meals. These foods can also cause tooth decay.

Quick Snack Ideas

- Popcorn*
- Dry WIC cereal (or with one percent or skim milk)
- Yogurt
- String cheese
- Low fat cheese and wheat crackers
- Pudding made with one percent or skim milk
- Cut up fruits and vegetables*
- Popsicles made with 100 percent juice
- Canned fruit or fruit cups in juice
- Peanut butter *+ on wheat bread or crackers

Easy to Make Snacks – involve children in making snacks

- **Chocolate Pops** – fill popsicle containers with lowfat chocolate milk. Freeze until firm.
- **Peanut Butter *+ Cereal Bites** – mix honey and peanut butter and roll into balls. Roll balls in crushed cereal.
- **Crunchy Bananas** – peel bananas. Roll in peanut butter*+ or yogurt. Roll in crushed cereal. Freeze.
- **Fruit Salad** – mix cut fruit * with honey and serve. *Honey should not be served to children under one year of age.*
- **Trail Mix** – mix Chex cereal, pretzels, nuts*+ and raisins* together.
- **Rainbow Kabobs** – add bite-size pieces of fruit,* cheese and vegetables* onto a skewer or straw.
- **Mini Pizza** – Add tomato or pizza sauce, cheese and diced veggies to half of an English muffin hamburger bun or slice of bread. Toast in oven.
- **Mini Cheese Quesadillas** – Cut a whole wheat tortilla in half then fold the half into half. Add three tablespoons of low-fat cheese in the middle. Toast in oven or heat in microwave for 30 seconds.
- **Make sugar-free Jello with fruit** – add fruit* (except pineapples) – chill in the refrigerator until jiggly and serve.

*Food is a common choking hazard. Many children do not chew their food well so they try to swallow it whole. If your child is four years of age or younger, cut the following foods into pieces no more than ½ inch to feed your child or don't feed them: hot dogs, nuts, seed, chunks of meat or cheese, hard grapes, popcorn, chunks of peanut butter, raw vegetables or raisins.

+This recipe contains peanuts or tree nuts. Please avoid these ingredients or this recipe if your child is allergic.



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