Kids are experts at snacking

According to a United States Department of Agriculture study, after-school snacks provide about one-third of children’s calories. Because children have smaller stomachs, they need the energy and nutrients provided by these mini-meals. However, when high fat, high sugar snack foods are combined with screen time—either TV or computer—instead of active play time, children are likely to gain more weight than they should for optimum health.

Choosing food implies having POWER

Refusing to eat certain foods or demanding to eat others is one way children practice their growing independence. They test values and decide which ones to reject, modify, and adopt. Consequently, doing what everyone else is doing may become more tempting than doing what parents have taught.

The key for parents and caregivers is to strike a balance between providing good nutrition and letting children make independent decisions. One way to do this is by offering a wide variety of foods. Provide food choices that offer a range of taste experiences, such as crunchy, soft, chewy, smooth, hot, cold, sweet, sour, bland, and spicy.

Food should never be used as a reward for good behavior, or withheld as punishment for bad behavior.

Focus on physical activity as well as food

All children benefit from physical activity—walking, riding bikes, or playing together is a great way to build family communication. If your child shows a tendency toward being overweight, encourage more physical activity and less screen time at the television or computer. Do not cut back drastically on food intake. Children need those nutrients for growth and development.

Distinguish between food facts and myths

Current research does not support claims that sugar and food colors are linked to hyperactivity, criminal behavior, or increased anxiety. However, meal-skipping, especially breakfast, has been shown to harm children’s performance in school.

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
Extension and Outreach

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Plan snack choices
Offer snacks that fulfill part of the daily recommendation for these food groups.

Choose more snacks that have:
• 2 or more grams of fiber
• 10% of the Daily Value for one of the following:
  • Vitamin A
  • Vitamin C
  • Calcium
  • Iron

Choose fewer snacks that have:
• 10% or more of the Daily Value for total fat
• 10% or more of the Daily Value for sodium
• More than 10 to 15 grams of sugar
• Remember that every 4 grams equal 1 teaspoon of sugar.

Recommended food intake is based on children who get 30 to 60 minutes of moderate activity, such as walking briskly or biking.

*Lower end of range represents the moderately active female while the upper end of the range represents the moderately active male.

2 Encourage label detectives
For snacks that do not fit in the MyPlate groups, examine the sugar, fat, and sodium content on the label.
Choose fewer snacks that have:
• 10% or more of the Daily Value for total fat
• 10% or more of the Daily Value for sodium
• More than 10 to 15 grams of sugar

Remember that every 4 grams equal 1 teaspoon of sugar.

Vegetables
- Baby carrots*
- Cauliflowerettes, slightly cooked, chilled
- Celery sticks*
- Celery stuffed with peanut butter or cheese*
- Green or red pepper pieces*
- Vegetable juices
- Cherry tomatoes*
- Zucchini pieces*
- Ranch Dip (See page 4)

Super snacks in seconds
Here are some examples of how you and your child could combine foods from the two snack stations for a nutritious snack:
- Oatmeal cookies and milk
- Raw vegetables and cheese dip
- Cheese and crackers
- Cottage cheese and fresh fruit
- Raisin bread toast and fruit juice

Money saving tip: Make your own ready-to-go snacks by portioning them into small plastic bags or reusable plastic containers.

Chilly help-yourself refrigerator snacks
Place these snacks in a storage bin or on a shelf in the lower part of the refrigerator so that children can reach them. Also, be sure children have access to water in a cup or bottle.

Fruits
- Apple wedges*
- Apple wedges, peeled
- Applesauce
- Apricots, fresh or canned
- Banana chunks
- Fruit slushes
- Fruiticles, frozen
- Grapes, seedless*
- 100% juice boxes
- Kiwi halves
- Melon pieces
- Nectarine, fresh
- Orange sections
- Tangerine segments
- Peach or pear pieces, fresh or canned in juice
- Pineapple chunks
- Plums, fresh or canned
- Strawberries

Dairy
(Choose low-fat milk options most often.)
- Cheese cubes or slices
- String cheese
- Fruit yogurt
- Milk, plain or flavored
- Pudding cups
- Cottage cheese

Protein
- Hard-cooked egg

Money saving tip: These foods may cause choking in children under the age of 5.

Create snack stations
To help children practice making snack choices, some families set up snack areas in the refrigerator and in a kitchen cupboard. Children are allowed to choose from either.

Yummy help-yourself cupboard snacks
Place these on a shelf in a cupboard that children can reach.

Fruits
- 100% fruit roll-ups
- Apple rings, dried
- Apricots, dried
- Banana halves
- Prunes, pitted
- Raisins
- Cranberries, dried
- Pineapple, dried

Protein
- Peanut butter
- Roasted soynuts or pumpkin seeds
- Sunflower seeds

Grains
(Choose whole grain options most often; look for whole grain as the first ingredient.)
- Bagel
- Banana bread
- Breadstick
- Bread, whole grain or enriched
- Cereal pieces, low sugar (such as Cheerios®, Chex®, Crispix®)
- Cookies
- Cornbread
- Crackers (animal, graham, oyster, whole grain)
- English muffin
- Granola, low fat
- Muffins, low fat
- Pita bread
- Popcorn*
- Pumpkin bread
- Pretzel, soft
- Raisin bread
- Vanilla wafers
- Whole wheat tortillas
Ranch Dip for Veggies*
2/3 cup light sour cream
1/3 cup light mayonnaise
1 tablespoon cider vinegar
1 teaspoon dried dill
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
Pinch of salt
Pinch of freshly ground black pepper

In a small bowl, whisk together sour cream, mayonnaise, and vinegar until smooth. Add dill, mustard, salt, and pepper. Whisk to blend. Cover and refrigerate up to one week.

Makes four 1/4-cup servings.
Per serving: 104 calories, 1 gram protein, 9 grams fat, 5 grams carbohydrate, 128 mg sodium, 21 mg cholesterol

Mild Salsa Cheese Dip*
1/2 cup mild salsa
1 cup shredded light cheddar cheese
4 ounces light cream cheese
1 to 2 tablespoons ketchup

Sprinkle the top with almonds.

In a small microwaveable bowl, combine salsa, cheddar cheese, and cream cheese. Microwave on medium for 1 minute or until cheeses are melted. Stir in ketchup until mixture is smooth. Cover and refrigerate up to one week, reheating when served. Good with veggies and crackers.

Makes four 1/4-cup servings.
Per serving: 128 calories, 10 grams protein, 6 grams fat, 6 grams carbohydrate, 615 mg sodium, 19 mg cholesterol

Fruity Parfait**
Create your own variations by using other fruits as desired.
2 cups chopped fresh pineapple or canned pineapple tidbits
1 cup frozen raspberries, thawed
1 cup low-fat vanilla yogurt
1 firm, medium banana, peeled and sliced
1/3 cup chopped dates
1/4 cup sliced almonds

In four glasses, layer pineapple, raspberries, yogurt, banana, and dates. Sprinkle the top with almonds.

Makes four servings.
Per parfait: 238 calories, 6 grams protein, 5 grams fat, 47 grams carbohydrate, 43 mg sodium, 3 mg cholesterol

* Adapted from: Better Food for Kids, Saab, J. and Kalnins, D. Robert Rose Inc. Toronto, Ontario 2002
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