

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Snacks - the Healthy Way

School has started. The children are out of the house during the day, but you know they'll be arriving at the front door with their hunger intact! No matter how much they eat at school, growing children are going to need a snack by mid-afternoon. In fact, snacks are an important part of making sure that children do get all the nutrients they need to grow. They're good for adults too! So don't feel bad yourself, or penalize the children because they want to eat before dinner, and again after dinner.

The trick is making sure that the snacks that are available do contain those nutrients that children need. The snacks you find in every corner store and grocery store are often processed white flour, processed oils, added salt and added sugars. There are not many nutrients there, but way too many calories for a healthy weight that balances with height. So skip the snack aisles of the stores and stock up on the good stuff for your children. The kids will be healthier and your pocketbook with thank you!

One quality that makes a food a snack, rather than a meal, is the size of the portion. Snacks should be smaller than meals. That means that it might be up to you to prepare and package foods in smaller portions for children. If they fill up on all the snacks available, they won't have any room for the dinner you'll be making. Remember, a child's stomach is about the size of their two fists held together. You don't want them to fill it completely at snack time. So keep sizes small.

Another thing that makes a food a snack is that it's easy to grab. Convenient foods are good snacks - if they're healthy. But just because it's easy to grab a bag of chips doesn't make it a good snack. But baby carrots certainly are!

One other thing to look for in snacks is that they should have a variety of vitamins, minerals, maybe fiber, and not just sugar. So that leaves out the sodas, sports drinks and 'power' drinks. Some juice is fine, but only once a day. It has lots of sugar, with not a whole lot else. Whole fruit is much better! It can be fresh fruit, or canned fruit such as applesauce, cups of fruit chunks, dishes of frosty frozen fruit pieces, or a smoothie of frozen fruit and milk every once in awhile.

So, how do you find enough healthy snacks to keep your children growing? Here are some suggestions from the ChooseMyPlate.gov website. There's a whole section for children and parents there, with lots of other ideas too. Check it out!

Save time by slicing veggies. Keep some ready to grab in the refrigerator, along with low-fat dips. Pre-package them in baggies, ready for little hands.

Mix dried fruits, nuts, popcorn or whole grain cereals for older children who won't be in danger of choking. These too can be prepackaged in baggies or plastic cups.

Keep low-fat milk on hand. Chocolate or strawberry milk is super healthy too, as long as it's low fat. If children prefer the flavored kinds, that's fine!

Some good protein snacks can include hard-cooked eggs, string cheese, unsalted nuts, or low-salt deli meats such as sliced turkey. Again, keep a selection on a lower shelf of the refrigerator for children to get to easily.

Whole-grain breads are top choices for sandwiches. Whole-grain pancakes, cereals and popcorn are also good grain snacks. Make a pb&j with whole-grain bread and cut it in quarters. Or use a cookie cutter to make it more interesting for the little ones.

One particularly hot days, stick single-serving size cups of fruit or yogurt in the freezer about half an hour before the children are due to arrive. They'll be frosty and slightly crunchy, but not frozen solid, and much healthier than ice cream!

You can get the little ones to help you make these frozen treats in advance. Keep them in the freezer until they need a cold snack.

Banana Logs

Bananas

Peanut or almond butter

Hard shell ice cream coating - chocolate, strawberry or other flavor

Peel the bananas and slice in half lengthwise then in shorter pieces, or cut in rounds. Put on a cookie sheet and freeze until firm. Spread half the slices with peanut or almond butter. Stick one of the other pieces on top (like a sandwich). Put the hard shell topping in a small bowl and roll the frozen banana sandwiches in the topping to coat. Put back on cookie sheet and freeze again. Each banana will make 4 to 6 logs or bites.

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