Healthy Snacking 101



Healthy snacks fuel your children's brains and bodies between meals. Use these ideas to make snack time simpler and more nutritious for everyone in your household!

Everyday tips

Puzzled about how to come up with healthy snacks for your youngsters? Try these ideas:

■ Keep a variety of fruit in the house. Go for kid favorites like bananas, apples, and oranges, but also encourage your children to sample less-familiar produce, perhaps mangoes, kiwis, papayas, or blackberries. *Tip:* Look for fruit that's in season or on sale to keep costs down.

■ Raw vegetables make great snacks. Offer green beans or baby carrots with a dip of low-fat ranch dressing or guacamole.

■ Together, read food labels when you're grocery shopping. Make a game of picking out nutritious snacks and drinks. *Example:* See who can find the granola bars with the least sugar or the salsa with the lowest sodium.

■ Look for healthier versions of snacks your youngsters like. For instance, get baked crackers, whole-wheat pretzels, and low-fat string cheese.

■ Store healthy snacks in your pantry or refrigerator at your children's eye level. Your kids will see them first and be more apt to reach for them.



Fruit surprises

Your children will be delighted by the treat in the middle of these fruit pops.

Pour 100% juice (grape, orange, apple) into paper cups. Stand the cups upright in the freezer. Then, put a strawberry or pineapple chunk on the end of an ice cream stick. When the juice cups are partially frozen, insert the sticks, burying the fruit inside the juice. When they're completely frozen, peel off the paper cup for a surprise snack!



■ Put together snacks that combine two major nutrients. Serving a protein and a carbohydrate together—a turkey and cheese sandwich, for instance—will fill your kids up and give them energy. Add a drink (water, fat-free milk) to keep them hydrated.

■ Buy snacks like whole-grain cereal, nuts, and dried fruits in bulk to cut costs, and then package them in individual servings in zipper bags. *Note:* Show your children how to check the nutrition label to find the size of one serving. It's often not the whole bag or box!

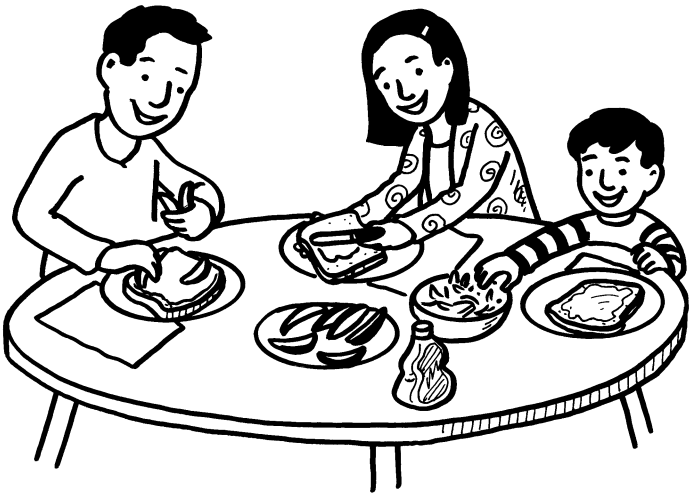
■ Take along healthy snacks when you go out. You'll avoid stopping for fast food or buying junk food from snack bars or vending machines when your youngsters are hungry.

■ Let your children pitch in and help prepare their own snacks. Steer them toward healthier choices, and watch as they happily eat what they've made!

continued

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At home

Vary snacks to keep youngsters interested, and spend time as a family coming up with new creations. These suggestions will get you started:

■ Make yogurt parfaits. In a clear cup, layer low-fat plain Greek yogurt, blueberries, crushed graham crackers, and a drizzle of honey. Repeat the layers.

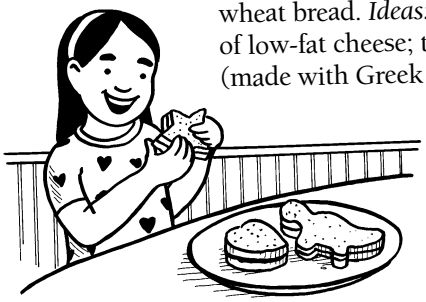
■ Spread honey mustard on two slices of whole-wheat bread. Layer sliced apples and low-fat cheddar cheese inside. Wrap the sandwich in foil, and bake for 10 minutes at 350°.

■ Use corn tortillas, pita rounds, or English muffin halves to make mini-pizzas. Top with low-sodium tomato sauce, grated skim mozzarella cheese, and vegetables (sliced mushrooms, broccoli pieces). Sprinkle on oregano. Broil 3–5 minutes, until the cheese bubbles.

Cookie-cutter sandwiches

Snack-size sandwiches are more fun to eat when they're shaped like dinosaurs, stars, or hearts.

Make your youngsters' favorite sandwiches with whole-wheat bread. *Ideas:* lean ham and a slice of low-fat cheese; tuna or chicken salad (made with Greek yogurt); grape jelly (reduced sugar). Then, use cookie cutters to make them into shapes (the extra pieces make good finger foods, too).



■ Slice a cucumber in half horizontally, and hollow out the insides. Fill the cucumber cups with a "light" egg salad (mash 2 hard-boiled eggs with 1 tsp. reduced-fat mayonnaise).

■ For an easy dip, drain and rinse a 14-oz. can of beans (kidney, cannellini), and put them in a blender or food processor with 1 tbsp. apple cider vinegar, $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. chili powder, and a pinch of cumin. Blend until smooth. Serve with baked tortilla chips.

On the go

Keep these healthy snacks on hand for your children to take wherever they go:

■ Let them design their own trail mix. Set out bowls of cereal, different kinds of unsalted nuts, golden raisins, and sunflower seeds. They can measure, mix, and match ingredients in zipper bags, then label their bags with names they invent ("Bradley's Blend," "Energy to Go").



■ Buy individual cups of applesauce, fat-free pudding, or fruit packed in its own juice (mandarin oranges, peaches, fruit cocktail). Or package single servings in small, reusable plastic containers.

■ Bake your own pita chips. Slice whole-grain pita bread into chip-size triangles. Put the pieces on a baking sheet, and brush lightly with olive oil. Bake at 350° until crisp, about 10 minutes.

■ Fresh fruit is portable and always healthy. Your youngsters can take a piece of whole fruit (peach, plum, pear) on the way out the door. Or freeze a bunch of grapes for a frosty fruit treat.

Editor's Note: Nutrition Nuggets™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.

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