

Parent Communications— Super Snacks

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Snacking the Healthy Way!

Snacking . . . America's favorite past time. For children, snack time is not only enjoyable but also necessary. According to child health experts, snacking is an important part of the diet for children, contributing almost a quarter of the day's calories. So make sure that your kids' snack foods pack a punch for nutrition, not just taste. This can be tricky when so many children ask for foods that are high on flavor (from all the saturated and trans fat and sugar) but low on nutrition.

What makes a healthy snack? Think minimeal instead of the chips, soft drinks, and cookies that food manufacturers advertise as snack foods. Here are some qualities to keep in mind when planning and serving foods to children for a snack.

- ▶ **Mix it up!** Choose foods from at least two of the food groups. For example, serve low-fat cheese (dairy), whole wheat crackers (grain), and apples (fruit).
- ▶ **Include a fruit or vegetable.** It's hard for kids to eat enough of these unless you serve them at snack time in addition to meals.
- ▶ **Aim for about 200 calories per snack time.** This will satisfy the appetite without overdoing it.
- ▶ **Watch the saturated fat, salt, and sugar content.** Try to pick foods that are low in all of these most of the time.
- ▶ **Steer clear of trans fat.** Trans fat is very common in processed foods. Read the ingredients to avoid purchasing anything with partially hydrogenated oil.

How much snacking is okay? This depends on your child's overall diet. But a good rule of thumb is to provide snacks 2 to 3 hours between meals.

Optional sidebar:

Try These Super Snack Ideas!

- ▶ Baby carrots and low-fat yogurt
- ▶ Cucumbers and low-fat cheese
- ▶ Applesauce and graham crackers

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(continued)

- ▶ Hard-boiled eggs and sparkling water with a splash of 100% juice (remember to limit juice to no more than 8 ounces per day. Juice contains vitamins and minerals, but it naturally contains a large amount of fruit sugar (fructose) and it lacks the fiber found in fresh whole fruit.)
- ▶ Hummus and whole-grain tortilla chips
- ▶ Dry cereal and low-fat milk

Optional e-mail message: Use this sample message to communicate with parents by e-mail (if available).

Subject Line: Healthy Habits Power Tips—Super Snacks

Dear (your school name and grade) Parents,

This week the *Eat Well & Keep Moving* program (your school and grade) will focus on super snacks. Our key message is to choose healthy snacks that are low in saturated fat and trans fat.

We'll talk about what makes a healthy snack, how to read the Nutrition Facts food label to identify healthy snacks, and which foods should to be eaten only sometimes. To boost the nutrition in your children's snacks, follow these Healthy Habits Power Tips:

- ▶ **Choose snacks wisely.** Children need energy between meals, in the form of a snack, and snacks can provide about 25% of your child's nutrition.
- ▶ **Think of snacks as minimeals.** Try to have the snack include foods that come from 3 of the 5 food groups—fruits, vegetables, grains, milk, and meat, fish, and beans—and that are low in saturated fat, trans fat, and added sugar.
- ▶ **You can and should limit your child's access to low-nutrition foods such as candy, cookies, and chips, serving them only as occasional treats.** It's easier to say no if you don't keep those foods in the house routinely.

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