

Healthy Snacking for Children

Lesson

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Objectives:

- Participants will learn how to choose healthy foods for snacks.
- Participants will learn appropriate drink beverages for children.
- Participants will learn how to create healthy snacks.

Time: Approximate length of time: one hour

Materials needed: “MyPyramid” poster
“Is Your Food a Healthy Choice?” worksheet
“Create Your Own Snacks” worksheet
“Choose a Healthy Snack” worksheet
“Snack Quiz” worksheet

Handouts: Involve Kids in the Kitchen
MyPyramid for Kids—Tips for Families
How Calorie Savvy Are You? Quiz
100 Calorie Snacks: 20 Choices
Ways to Sweeten without Table Sugar

Introduction

How many of you find you’re snacking regularly? Do your children enjoy snacking? Well, snacking is good, but only with healthy food choices. [Pass out the “Snack Quiz” worksheet (handout 1).]

What foods do you think of when you think of snack foods? (Make a list on a flipchart). Let’s look at these snacks and divide them into those that are healthy and those that we should eat less often. (Make two lists on the board.)

Let’s try to think of some other snack foods that would be healthy. Examples:

Fruit	Low-fat yogurt	Whole-grain breads
Vegetables	Low-fat dips	Pudding made with skim milk
Crackers	Unsweetened cereal	Raisins

(Give an example of a food that is a healthy snack that is not on the list. For instance: vegetables.)

Why do you think no one said vegetables were their favorite healthy snack? [Then discuss possible reasons: It takes time to prepare (washing, cutting) for snacks. Kids won’t eat.]

Suggest that veggies can be washed and stored in the refrigerator so they will be ready to eat for snack time anytime the child wants. Keeping low-fat dips on hand may encourage children to eat raw veggies.

Why are certain foods popular snacks while other foods may not be as popular? (Refer to the list the participants provided.) The reason could be that some are advertised through TV commercials, in magazines, and in stores, and others may not be advertised at all. So, those that are advertised are known by consumers and are thought of as popular because many may purchase.

The Importance of Snacks

Over the past decade, the word “snack” has gotten a bad reputation. When the word snack is mentioned, the first things that come to mind are chips, cookies, or candy. However, *healthful snacking* can make a big difference in the daily nutrition intake of kids of all ages.

Snacks should fill the gap of nutrition that may be missed during mealtime. Without snacks, it’s difficult for kids to meet their daily nutrient needs and have enough energy left to keep going and growing. The growth rate for most children is significant. It's this growth that makes it so important for kids to eat frequently, including snacks.

Eating every three to four hours also helps control overeating due to hunger. Young children’s tiny stomachs can hold only small portions of food at one time. The most important thing is to help your children make *wise snack choices*. Healthful snacking supports lifelong healthy eating habits and prevents costly and potential disabling diseases (**i.e., diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity**).

(Note: Have examples of healthy snacks—food models, boxes, containers, or actual foods. Discuss at this time the benefits of each and nutritional content of each.)

(Pass out and discuss the handout “MyPyramid for Kids--*Tips for Families.*”)

How Do You Snack Healthy?

Three simple rules:

1. Keep it simple:
Make fresh, canned, or dried fruits accessible to children.
Have a variety of colorful, crunchy veggies on hand, already cut up and ready to eat.
2. Have variety and balance:
Choose foods from all food groups for kids to enjoy.
Stock the refrigerator or pantry with “help yourself” nutritious foods (ex.: whole-grain breads and bagels, low-fat granola, or trail mix and yogurt).
3. Limit fatty, sugary snacks:
Snack on fruit instead of candy or fresh veggies instead of potato chips.

[Pass out “Create a Snack” (handout 2) for participants to complete. Allow time for them to discuss their snack choices, and discuss the following ideas when everyone has finished.]

Ideas for Create-a-Snack

Individual Pizzas—Mix ready-made spaghetti sauce or tomato sauce with garlic powder or oregano. Spread it on toasted English muffins, mini bagels, hamburger buns, or crackers. Top with shredded mozzarella, cheddar, or American cheese. Heat in a 400° F oven or toaster oven until cheese melts.

Fruit Mush—Put milk or yogurt in a blender with cut-up fruits of your choice and a few ice cubes. Blend until mushy.

Salad Pockets—Chop a few different vegetables and stuff them into a pita (or roll them in a tortilla). Top the vegetables with shredded cheese, salsa, plain yogurt flavored with garlic powder, or salad dressing.

Start with these veggies and add your child's favorites:

- Lettuce leaves
- Chopped peppers or onions
- Thin carrot slices
- Shredded cabbage
- Diced tomatoes
- Spinach leaves
- Mushrooms
- Chickpeas

Cheese Biscuits—Make your own biscuit dough using a biscuit mix. Brush biscuits with melted butter. Press a ½-inch cheese cube into each biscuit and bake according to package directions.

Tortilla Roll-Ups—Spread lunchmeat slices on a tortilla with mayonnaise or mustard. Top with a slice of cheese and a pickle, apple, carrot, celery, or cucumber stick. Roll up and fasten with a toothpick. You can also use peanut butter and fruit.

Convenience Foods for Snacks

Oftentimes, it is easier to pick up a package of ready-to-eat foods (crackers, chips, microwave popcorn, frozen pizza treats, etc.) for a snack. However, often these foods are high in fat, sugar, and/or salt. When shopping for snack foods, be sure to read labels for the ingredients content and amount of fat, sugar, and salt in the food. Today there are many snack choices in convenience foods; shop wisely for healthy snacks.

So What Are Your Best Choices?

- Raw vegetables, such as celery, carrots, cauliflower, broccoli, green pepper, green beans, cucumbers, mushrooms, or zucchini may be served with low-fat dip.
- Fresh fruit (in season), such as apples, oranges, bananas, peaches, grapefruit, grapes, melons, pears, plums, or strawberries; cut in slices or halves.
- Low-fat quick breads and muffins, such as zucchini, banana, or bran.
- Non-sugared cereals, snack mixes made with popcorn and whole grain cereal.
- Low-fat yogurt with fresh, frozen, or canned fruit.

- Shakes with low-fat milk or yogurt and fruit.
- Unsweetened fruit juices.

Activity

Divide class into groups. Give each group several snack (healthy & unhealthy) nutrition facts labels and “Is Your Food a Healthy Choice?” worksheet. Make sure you distribute the same number of nutrition facts labels as “Is Your Food a Healthy Choice?” worksheets to each group (one nutrition facts label for every “Is Your Food a Healthy Choice?” worksheet).

Healthy Beverages

Fruit juice and fruit drinks have been confused with one another. They are not the same, and in many homes have been replaced with milk and water consumption. Milk is the best source of calcium, and children are not meeting the recommended intake. Low-fat and fat-free milks are better choices than whole milk.

Tooth decay is on the increase, and fruit juice is loaded with natural sugar. Gastrointestinal problems also can result from a high intake of fruit juice. It is preferred that fruit juice consumption be limited to less than 12 ounces per day depending on the age of the child. Water should be the main drink served to kids at snack time. Examples are seltzer or sparkling water (purchase only calorie-free varieties; flavored or unflavored).

Selecting Juice for Children

Read food labels and choose **100 percent pure fruit juice**. Fruit drinks, punches, "-ades," or low-percent juice products may be fortified with vitamin C, *but they are low in potassium and high in sugar*.

Tips for parents:

- ❑ Exotic flavors like mango, kiwi, or passion fruit have grown to be quite popular; nevertheless, orange juice still sets the "**gold standard**" for providing the greatest amount of vitamin C. Vitamin C keeps gums, skin, tissue, and bones healthy.
- ❑ Serve juice in moderation so children do not fill up before mealtimes. Too much juice will leave little room for other nutritious foods needed for growth and development. As a rule, children between the ages of two and three should drink no more than **four to eight ounces a day**, and less for younger children.
- ❑ Check out the grams of sugar on the label. If it's not pure juice, look at the list of ingredients to see if additional sugar has been added.
- ❑ Parents should not serve juice combinations to infants unless they have been introduced to each individual juice previously to avoid allergic reaction.
- ❑ Juice products that are calcium-fortified can be good sources of calcium for individuals who do not get an adequate amount of dairy products in their diets.
- ❑ Children imitate what they see their parents doing. Parents can set a good example by drinking water or 100 percent juice instead of soda or other non-nutritional drinks.

(Discuss “Involve Kids in the Kitchen” handout with participants.)

Summary

What can you do? Let the children share in food selection, menu planning, and food preparation to increase their level of responsibility for their own eating as well as making a contribution to the family's mealtime tasks. When shopping, pick up a variety of healthy and quick-to-fix foods from each group. Then let the children help themselves from the healthy choices that are available. With one-quarter of children's calories coming from snacks, improving the foods children eat for snacks can help improve their overall eating patterns.

Raising Healthy Kids

Steps to remember when planning healthy snacks:

1. **Plan snack choices** – Offer snacks that fulfill part of the daily recommendations for the food groups outlined by the MyPyramid.
2. **Encourage label detectives** – For snacks that do not fit in the MyPyramid groups, examine the fat, sodium, and sugar content on the label.
3. **Create snack stations** – Children often like to make their own choices, including what snack to eat. Some families keep two sets of snack choices, one in the refrigerator and another in a kitchen cupboard. Children are allowed to choose from either.
4. **Provide chef-in-training opportunities** – Healthy snacks taste even better when kids create them with their own hands.

Simple No-Cook Healthy Snack Ideas

Protein Boost

Try to get kids to eat a snack that is filled with protein at snack time instead of one that is sugary. Try a few of these ideas and judge for yourself. Please note: While some of these require a bit of preparation ahead of snack time, they will keep in the refrigerator for several days. Many are great with your choice of whole grain, rice-or-nut crackers, or as a dip for raw vegetable sticks.

- Egg salad
- Tuna salad
- Sliced hard-boiled eggs (or deviled eggs)
- String cheese, cheese cubes and slices - dairy or non-dairy varieties
- Yogurt – dairy or non-dairy varieties
- Natural nut butters: try spreading on sliced apples or bananas
- Nuts – almonds, cashews, peanuts, pecans, pistachios, walnuts
- Seeds – pumpkin, sunflower, sesame

Sweet Favorites

Feed a sweet craving with naturally delicious fruits and vegetables. Many are great mixed with nuts and seeds or spread with natural nut butters.

- Fresh fruit smoothie
- Applesauce
- Fruit bar cookies
- Raw vegetable sticks
- Fruit leather
- Fresh fruit

(Sweet Favorites – continued)

- Dried fruit
- Sliced tomatoes
- Whole cherry tomatoes
- Sliced cucumber
- Pickles

All about the Crunch

Many of these crunchy foods are excellent with cheese slices for a boost of protein.

- Pretzels
- Low-fat or baked chips
- Rice or popcorn cakes
- Popcorn
- Crispy rice treats
- Granola bar
- Graham crackers
- Dry cereal
- Snack crackers
- Soy or rice crisps
- Trail mix

Nutritious Thirst Quenchers

Staying away from sugary sodas is easier when offering other great tasting options.

- Yogurt drinks
- Flavored dairy and non-dairy milks
- 100% juice mixed with sparkling water
- Vegetable juice

Sources: Iowa State University Extension, Cooperative Extension Service, Kansas State University, and University of Illinois Extension Service, and Whole Foods Market.

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Snack Quiz

Handout 1

Examine your snacking habits by answering the following questions:

1. Do your snacks fit into one of these groups: meat, poultry, fish and alternates, fruit, vegetable, bread, cereal and other grains, milk, cheese and yogurt?
2. Do you avoid snacks within one hour before a meal?
3. Do you have a written snack plan?
4. At this moment, do you have a bowl of fresh fruits or a container of cut vegetables available in the refrigerator?
5. Do you snack when you are hungry?
6. Do you clean your teeth after snacks?

Create Your Own Snacks

Handout 2

Have participants to create snacks using foods from the MyPyramid. For example, **fresh or frozen fruits + yogurt = smoothie**. Encourage them to do the snack with their children if it's not currently being done.

Create your own snacks

_____ + _____ = _____

_____ + _____ = _____

_____ + _____ = _____

TRY TO INCLUDE AT LEAST TWO DIFFERENT FOOD GROUPS.

MyPyramid Food Guide

Dairy Group

Meat Group

Vegetable Group

Fruit Group

Grain Group

Involve Kids in the Kitchen

Handout 3

Children enjoy helping in the kitchen and often are more willing to eat foods they help prepare. Involve your child in planning and preparing some snacks for the family.

MEAL PREPARATION ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

1. Children have to be shown and taught how to do these activities. Each child has his or her own pace for learning, so give it time and the skills will come.
2. When your child is helping you with food preparation, don't forget cleanliness. Wash hands using soap and warm running water before and after handling food or utensils to prepare food.
3. Children learn by touching, tasting, feeling, smelling, and listening. They love to help prepare food and cook because they can use all their senses. Children like to eat the foods they make. Plan ways the children in your care can help you. Be sure to consider the age of the child.
4. Expect a few spills. It's a small price to pay for helping your children become comfortable around food.
5. Give children jobs to help with cleanup.
6. Children have short attention spans. Give them quick, simple jobs, and give instructions one at a time.
7. Remember young cooks need constant supervision.
8. Adding variety is the key to planning menus using the MyPyramid. The foods you offer your child each day should include choices from all five food groups. Meals and snacks should also include different choices within each food group. For example, offer different vegetables, especially dark-green leafy and deep-yellow ones, and fruits.