

Grab Healthy After-School Snacks

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It's back to school time and if your children are as hungry as I was after school you had better be prepared! I was always starving.

Why do kids need snacks? Children and teens are more likely to need snacks because of their growth spurts and physical activities. Small children have less stomach capacity. They may run out of steam at midmorning or mid-afternoon, especially if they have been active. Children often cannot eat enough at three meals a day to satisfy their hunger and provide all the nutrients needed by their bodies. Many foods commonly considered snacks are high in fat, sugar and sodium. If these foods are provided often children's health may be affected.

Smart snacks can help children and teens eat and drink enough during the day. Think of snacks as mini-meals that help provide the nutrients and food energy they need to grow, play and **learn**.

Snacks between meals fill in gaps for needed nutrients such as vitamins A and C and calcium. Surveys reveal that many children do not get enough of these nutrients so snacks are the place to sneak them in.

Nutritious Snack Combos

For more nutrition offer two or three food group choices as snacks. Good food sources of calcium include no fat or low fat yogurt, pudding and cheese. As a beverage, offer fat-free or 1% milk for children two and older. For foods rich in vitamins A and C and fiber, provide ready-to-eat fruits and vegetables. B vitamins and fiber are found in breads, crackers and cereals, especially those labeled whole grain. Nuts, peanut butter, beans, and hummus are all healthy snack ideas loaded with protein. Choose cookies and sweets less often. Read labels for the healthiest choices containing less sugar and fat or more fiber.

The young child's preference for sweets is related to what parents do or do not allow. According to a Cornell University study, children whose parents ate sweets frequently were likely to eat sweets more often than those whose parents seldom ate sweets. Sweet eating was also related to the amount of television watched by the child as well as to parents' attitudes toward giving the child sweets.

Let your children choose their snacks from a few healthy foods. This way they feel they have some control and end up with a healthy snack no matter what is selected. Anticipate snack needs so you can avoid last minute snacking decisions. Tempt hungry kids with healthy snacks. Kids most often have extra big appetites after school, before bed or following sports activities.

Snack wisely yourself! Do you snack when you feel stressed or bored – or just when you're hungry? What foods do you snack on? Eat nutritious meals and snacks with your children. Remember your child learns snack habits by watching you. Be a great role model!

Consider the following guidelines to help your children develop healthy snacking habits:

1. Plan snacks as part of the daily food plan.
2. Serve snacks and meals that satisfy a child's need for extra nutrients and for different types of foods – crunchy, soft, chewy, smooth, hot, cold, sweet, sour, bland, spicy.
3. Offer snacks to satisfy hunger. Never offer food as a reward for good behavior or to quiet tears as this practice can lead to emotional overeating in the future.
4. Limit intakes of sweet beverages. Limit the amount of "liquid calories" available, such as soda, fruit *drinks* and other sweetened beverages. Encourage kids to drink water, milk and 100% fruit juice as the beverages of choice.

For more snack ideas check out the UF/IFAS Extension publication, *Snack Attacks – Be Prepared and Healthy Snacks for Children*, FCS8865 at our website <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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