

Healthy Snacks for Kids

PHYSICIANS COMMITTEE FOR RESPONSIBLE MEDICINE

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Busy families sometimes have trouble fitting in three healthy meals each day. Like it or not, snacking has become an important contributor to daily food intake. According to a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) survey of nearly 10,000 children, twice as many kids today eat snack foods, like crackers, popcorn, pretzels, and corn chips, as kids did just 20 years ago. Soda consumption has increased 37 percent for six- to nine-year-olds during the same time period. While children are eating extra calories, many still fall short on meeting their needs for vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin E, vitamin B₆, zinc, and iron.

What does this all mean? You'll want to take extra care to make certain your child's snacks are every bit as healthful as the meals you serve. The easiest way to do this is to use the same guidelines for snack planning as for meal planning. Many healthy, convenient options can be found within each of the New Four Food Groups—fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes.

Whether eaten on the go or at home after school, healthy snacks are easy and quick to put together and eat, and offer important nutrients and energy in each delicious bite. Keep healthy beverages, such as water, juice, and soymilk, and snack foods, such as the ones listed in the table below, on-hand at home and encourage your children to pack them into their bags before leaving the house.

HEALTHY SNACK IDEAS

- Chopped raw vegetables and dip
- Chunks of avocado, cucumber, or cooked sweet potato
- Breadsticks or pita chips with hummus
- Pretzels or popcorn
- Tortilla chips with bean dip
- Cheerios, granola, or other cereal in a bag
- Toasted whole grain breads or crackers with fruit spread or nut butters
- Graham crackers or gingersnaps dipped in applesauce
- Mini rice cakes with peanut butter
- Apple slices with hazelnut butter
- Fresh fruits
- Dried fruits, especially raisins
- Frozen bananas blended with a little non-dairy milk
- Applesauce or other fruit cups
- Nuts, especially mixed with dried fruit
- Soy yogurt
- Soy ice cream
- Individual boxes of soymilk, rice milk, or fruit juices
- Homemade muffins or cornbread
- Ramen soup with added vegetables
- Fresh soybeans (edamame)
- Bite-sized tofu cubes
- Tofu hot dogs

SNACK RECIPES FOR KIDS

Maple Walnut Granola • *Makes about 6 cups*

3 cups rolled oats
1 cup wheat germ
½ cup chopped walnuts
½ cup raisins
½ cup dried cranberries
¼ cup sesame seeds
¼ cup maple syrup
2 tablespoons molasses
1 teaspoon cinnamon

Preheat oven to 300°F.

Combine all ingredients in a large bowl and mix thoroughly.

Transfer to a 9- x 13-inch baking dish. Bake, turning often with a spatula, until mixture is golden brown, about 25 minutes.

Per 1/2-cup serving: 231 calories; 7 g protein; 39 g carbohydrate; 6.5 g fat; 2.5 g fiber; 5 mg sodium; calories from protein: 11%; calories from carbohydrates: 66%; calories from fats: 23%

Applesauce • *Makes about 6 cups*

6 large, tart apples (gravenstein, pippins, Granny Smith, etc.)
1 cup undiluted apple juice concentrate
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

For chunky applesauce, peel apples, then core and dice. Place in a large pan. Add apple juice concentrate, then cover and cook over low heat, stirring often, until apples are soft. Mash slightly with a fork if desired, then stir in cinnamon. Serve hot or cold.

For smoother applesauce, cut apples into quarters and remove cores. Chop finely in a food processor. Transfer to a pan and add apple juice concentrate and cinnamon. Cover and cook, stirring often, over low heat until tender, about 15 minutes.

Per 1/2-cup serving: 101 calories; 0.3 g protein; 26 g carbohydrate; 0.5 g fat; 2 g fiber; 6 mg sodium; calories from protein: 1%; calories from carbohydrates: 95%; calories from fats: 4%

Quick Bean Dip • *Makes about 2 cups*

Serve this dip with baked tortilla chips or use it as a burrito filling.

1 cup fat-free, vegetarian refried beans
1/2 - 1 cup salsa (you choose the heat)

Combine refried beans with salsa. Add more salsa for preferred consistency.

Per 1/4-cup serving: 63 calories; 4 g protein; 12 g carbohydrate; 0.2 g fat; 4 g fiber; 117 mg sodium; calories from protein: 25%; calories from carbohydrates: 72%; calories from fats: 3%

Pumpkin Spice Muffins • *Makes 10 to 12 muffins*

2 cups whole wheat flour or whole wheat pastry flour
1/2 cup sugar
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1 15-ounce can solid-pack pumpkin
1/2 cup raisins

Preheat oven to 375°F. Mix flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and nutmeg in a large bowl. Add pumpkin, 1/2 cup of water, and raisins. Stir until just mixed. Spoon batter into oil-sprayed muffin cups, filling to just below the tops.

Bake 25 to 30 minutes, until tops of muffins bounce back when pressed lightly. Remove from oven and let stand 5 minutes. Remove muffins from pan and cool on a rack. Store cooled muffins in an airtight container.

Per muffin: 131 calories; 3 g protein; 31 g carbohydrate; 0.5 g fat; 4 g fiber; 236 mg sodium; calories from protein: 10%; calories from carbohydrates: 87%; calories from fats: 3%

Veggies in a Blanket • *Makes 2 large roll-ups*

2 flour tortillas
2 tablespoons vegan cream cheese
1 grated carrot
2 lettuce leaves (or a handful of baby spinach leaves)

Warm tortillas in a dry pan. Spread vegan cream cheese on them. Add carrots and lettuce or spinach. Roll up and serve or wrap in plastic wrap for snacking later. *Variations:* Add thin sticks of cucumber or sweet red pepper before rolling.

Per roll-up: 159 calories; 4 g protein; 22 g carbohydrate; 6 g fat; 2 g fiber; 230 mg sodium; calories from protein: 10%; calories from carbohydrates: 55%; calories from fats: 35%