HEALTHY SNACKS FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Snacking is an important part of a preschool-aged child’s daily diet. Little children have smaller stomachs than adults, thus they cannot eat as much at meal time. Including healthy snacks between meals can assist children with meeting all of their nutrient needs. Unfortunately children often snack on cookies, chips, and sugary drinks throughout the day and then are not hungry at meal time.

Two keys to snacking success:

1. Set designated snack times (mid-morning and mid-afternoon). Limiting snacking to set times will help ensure your child is not munching all day and will be hungry again when it is meal time.

2. Select foods and drinks that are rich in the nutrients kids need to grow, including: calcium, iron, and fiber. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy are all good choices.

Snack Ideas:

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES:

Fruits: Sliced apples, oranges, bananas, grapes, melon, strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, peaches, pineapple, kiwi, unsweetened applesauce, and fruit canned in natural juices.

Vegetables: Baby carrots, celery sticks, cherry tomatoes, snap peas, bell peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, sliced zucchini, squash, and cucumbers.

Tip: Kids often like to dip their foods – consider offering yogurt, peanut butter, low-fat ranch, honey mustard, or hummus for kids to dip sliced fruits and vegetables into.

Tip: Fruit Juice – Purchase 100% fruit juice and limit your child’s intake to no more than 6-oz per day.

DAIRY:

1% Milk, Low-fat yogurt/yogurt sticks, string cheese, fruit smoothie cottage cheese (tip: mix in pineapple or peaches for a tasty treat)

ON-THE-GO SNACKS:

• Whole wheat tortillas, English muffins, mini bagels, and bread
• Top with peanut butter, low-fat cheese, deli meat (turkey, ham, roast beef), or tuna fish
• Granola bars, cereal bars, fruit bars
• Whole grain crackers, pretzels, and baked Tortilla chips
• Serve with salsa, avocado, reduced-fat beans, or hummus
• Dry cereal – choose cereals with less sugar, such as Cheerios, Oatmeal Squares, and Wheat Chex
• Graham crackers, animal crackers, vanilla wafers, fig/fruit newtons

Note: Preschool-aged children are at an increased risk for choking, especially children under the age of 4. Be cautious with providing small hard foods, such as popcorn, nuts, dried fruit, carrots, pretzels, hard candy, and chips to young children. Foods that are sticky (marshmallows, peanut butter), circular or round in shape (grapes, olives, cherry tomatoes), or easily swallowed (hot dogs) can also cause choking. To prevent choking, monitor children while eating, chop food into small pieces, limit distractions during snack time, and encourage children to eat slowly and to fully chew their food.

REFERENCES:

Center for Science in the Public Interest
http://cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/healthy_school_snacks.html

Texas Department of Agriculture

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics