

## Healthy snacks for children

Healthy snacks are as important to your child's growth and development as healthy meals. Young children have small stomachs and can't get all the nutrients they need from just 3 regular meals. Older children need snacks to stay alert and energetic throughout the day.

Having healthy snacks on hand should be part of your overall meal planning. Because snacks give children calories, these calories should come with nutrients. If snacks are foods found in Canada's Food Guide, you can be sure you are giving healthy snacks.

Canada's Food Guide includes:

- **Vegetables and fruit**, such as fresh or unsweetened canned fruit, cut up raw vegetables or vegetable juice.
- **Protein foods**, such as a hard boiled egg, yogurt, nuts and seeds, cheese, sliced meat, fruit smoothies made with milk, or a spread like hummus.
- **Whole grain products**, such as rice cakes, bran or whole wheat muffins, bread or pita, whole grain crackers, or unsweetened cereals.

## How else can I be sure my children have healthy snacks?

- Offer snacks from at least two food groups (for example, combine yogurt and fruit, or serve whole wheat pita and hummus).
- Bring healthy snacks with you so you aren't tempted to buy less nutritious snacks when on the go.
- Keep portion sizes small and scheduled (mid-morning and mid-afternoon). It's not a good idea to let your child graze all day.
- Offer water instead of juice. Limit juice to one serving, 125 mL (4 ounces) per day. If you do offer juice, be sure it is 100% fruit juice (with no added sugar). Too much

juice (especially apple juice) can cause toddler's diarrhea, early childhood tooth decay or fill them up before their next meal.

- Drinks with caffeine or added sugar, like tea, coffee, pop, and energy drinks should be avoided.
- Avoid sticky, sweet foods such as fruit leather and dried fruit, which can stick to the teeth and cause cavities. If you do serve them, be sure your child can brush their teeth right after.
- Limit low-nutrient, processed foods that are high in salt, fat, sugar or caffeine (cookies, snack bars, chips, chocolate, candies, soft drinks). If your child wants something sweet, offer fresh, frozen or canned fruit (but not fruit juice).
- Balance higher fat foods with lower fat foods like fruits and vegetables. Foods such as nuts and seeds are higher in fat, but are a good source of healthy fats and vitamins, so they can be included in moderation.
- When deciding on snacks, let your children choose between 2 or 3 healthy options.
- Make snack times part of the regular routine.
- Add snack options to your grocery list, so that you always have healthy choices handy. Avoid buying foods that you have to limit because they are not good choices. This will help the whole family make healthier snack choices.
- Spend a few minutes each day cutting fruit and vegetables so that they are ready to eat. Keep white milk and water in the fridge so it is ready to drink.
- Don't use snacks or treats as rewards.

## Additional resources

- Canada's Food Guide  
(<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php>)
- EatRight Ontario  
(<http://www.eatrightontario.ca/Doorway.aspx>)

## Reviewed by the following CPS committees

- Nutrition and Gastroenterology Committee
- Public Education Advisory Committee

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