

Healthy Snack Ideas

The issue of childhood health, fitness and obesity is never far from the headlines nowadays, and children are under more pressure than ever from advertising for high-fat and high-sugar foods. Often it can seem an impossible task to ensure our children are developing healthy eating habits, but there are ways in which you can help your child to make healthy choices.

Most children come home from school 'starving' and need a snack to keep them going until dinner. Don't be tempted to meet your child at the school gates with a bag of crisps or a chocolate bar, though. Most children can last until they get home. If you know your child won't manage this, take an easily portable snack such as a banana or a little tub of low-sugar cereal - kids love having things in little packets and boxes!

Once your child is home, make sure they have a big drink first. It is easy to confuse hunger with thirst, and with the best will in the world, many children forget to have enough to drink during a busy school afternoon. Offer water or milk if you can. If your child prefers juice, make sure it is well diluted. Try diluting fresh juice with carbonated water to make it seem like a fizzy drink. Then, if your child is still hungry, you can offer a healthier snack option. Try one of these suggestions:

- **Fruit kebabs** - Thread chunks of your child's favourite fruit onto skewers and serve with a yoghurt dip.
- **Dried fruit, nuts and seeds** - Allow for any allergies. Children under 5 should not be given whole nuts due to the risk of choking.
- **Veggie sticks or bread sticks** - Try with a dip made from cream cheese, plain yoghurt or hummus.
- **Popcorn** - The plain type you 'pop' at home is a relatively low-fat, high-fibre snack. Experiment with adding flavourings e.g. herbs, spices, a little butter and a tiny sprinkle of sugar or salt.
- **Crackers** - Try them plain or with peanut butter or cheese. Keep an eye on portion sizes, though.
- **Rice cakes or pretzels**
- **Toast, pita bread, crumpet or bagel**
- **Malt loaf with a scraping of butter**
- **Home-made ice lollies** - Lolly moulds are easily available. Fill them with diluted fruit juice and add chunks of your child's favourite fruit if you wish.
- **Smoothies** - Chop up a selection of fruits e.g. bananas, pineapple, mango, strawberries, raspberries and blueberries, and freeze in portion sizes. Then, whiz up a portion in a blender with a cup of milk (cow's, soya or nut milk are all fine), water, half water and half juice, or coconut water. You can also buy ready-frozen bags of berries and smoothie mixes at most supermarkets.
- **Cheese cubes with sliced apple or pineapple chunks**
- **Trail mix** - Get your child to help you make a mixture of raisins, sultanas, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds and dried cranberries. Add nuts if your child does not have an allergy, but bear in mind under 5s should not be given whole nuts. As a treat you could add a small sprinkle of chocolate chips.
- **Frozen yoghurt buttons** - Spoon dots of your child's favourite yoghurt onto a baking sheet lined with greaseproof paper, then freeze until firm.
- **Banana nut bites** - Sandwich slices of banana with peanut butter.

If you're a busy parent - and who isn't? - it can seem impossible to be organised enough to make sure healthy snacks are available. But most of these ideas require little or no preparation and are available to buy in the supermarket. Where something needs making up, such as the lollies, fruit kebabs or trail mix, get your child involved and prepare in bulk, perhaps at the weekend. Happy snacking!