

Say Yes to Healthy Snacks!



Snacks are an important part of children's daily nutrition in child care as well as at home. Be aware that a young child may eat little one day and a lot the next. In planning healthy snacks, consider food safety and known allergies as well as "snack appeal"!

Serve snacks from a variety of food groups.

Grains and carbohydrates. Young children will enjoy these snacks as part of the 3-4 cups needed each day: crackers with cheese spread, ready-to-eat cereal, mini rice cakes, and graham crackers.

Vegetables. Snacks can be a good way to work 2 cups of these foods into a child's daily diet. Try vegetable strips, such as cucumber or squash, cherry tomatoes cut into small pieces, steamed broccoli or carrots, green beans, or sugar peas. Offer a low-fat dressing or hummus for dipping.

Fruit. Sections of fruit (apples, tangerines, bananas, or pineapples), canned fruits, and juices are good choices. A child needs 1-1½ cups of fruit each day, but be careful not to overdo the juice. A serving for 4- to 6-year-olds is ¾ cup.

Milk products. Some good choices include milk shakes made with fruit, cheese slices or string cheese, and mini yogurt cups. One-half cup of milk or 1 ounce of cheese makes up 1 of the 4-5 servings young children should have each day.

Meat and protein. Children may enjoy hard-cooked eggs; peanut butter spread thinly on crackers, fruit, or vegetables; or bean dip thinly spread on crackers. Two to 3 ounces of meat, 1 egg, or 2 tablespoons of peanut butter count as 1 of the 2-3 recommended daily servings of meat or protein recommended for children ages 2 to 6.

Sweet and high-fat foods. Everyone enjoys an occasional treat, and a child's daily diet should include 2-3 teaspoons of oil or fat in his food. Try to limit the number of these foods. Eating them may keep a child from eating the foods he needs and can lead to overeating.

Take safety precautions in serving food.

Watch out for foods that may cause choking, including hot dogs, meat chunks, chips, nuts and seeds, popcorn, raisins, grapes, cherries, marshmallows, pretzels, large chunks of fruit or raw vegetables, peanut butter (when eaten by the spoonful), and round or hard candy. Some of these foods (like grapes or cherries) can be served if they are cut into small pieces. Peanut butter can be spread thinly on crackers or bread. Children love finger foods!

Know a child's allergies. Be sure that anyone who cares for a child is aware of her allergies and reports any allergic reactions to her parents. Severe reactions can be life threatening and may require emergency medical attention.

For related Web resources, see "Say Yes to Healthy Snacks!" at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

The opinions, resources, and referrals provided in this Tip Sheet are intended for information purposes only. Nothing in this Tip Sheet should be considered or used as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. We advise parents to seek the advice of a physician or other qualified health care provider with questions regarding their child's health or medical conditions.

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