

PREPARING HEALTHFUL SNACKS FOR CHILDREN

Bill's five-year old son **Tim** is always hungry. **Bill** doesn't think **Tim** should eat between **meals**. **Anna** isn't sure what to do. She calls **Ms. Lara** at the **Cooperative Extension Service Office** to get her advice.

Ms. Lara says that **snacks** are good for children. She tells **Anna** why **snacks** are important and what makes a **healthful snack**. **Ms. Lara** also gives **Anna** tips on **preparing** and serving **healthful snacks**.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SNACKING FOR CHILDREN

Ms. Lara says that **snacks** are important to **Tim's** daily **nutrition**. She says children need extra **energy** for growth. This is especially true for **physically active** children like **Tim**. But, children's **stomachs** are small. They can't eat enough at **meals** to get the **nutrition** they need. After three to four hours, their **stomachs** are empty and they feel hungry. **Ms. Lara** tells **Anna** that hungry children can be cranky. Hungry children may find it difficult to concentrate. Hungry children may even try to sneak **food** between **meals**.

Well-planned **snacks** keep children from getting too hungry between **meals**. They help children get all the daily **nutrients** they need for **healthy** growth and development. Learning to eat and enjoy **healthful snacks** will encourage **Tim's** future eating **habits**.

WHAT MAKES A HEALTHFUL SNACK?

Anna asks **Ms. Lara**, "What makes a **healthful snack**?" **Ms. Lara** tells **Anna** that a **healthful snack** is more than just calories. It is **nutritious**. **Ms. Lara** reminds **Anna** that **nutritious foods** provide **carbohydrates, proteins, fats, dietary fiber, minerals, vitamins, and water**. **Foods** that are low in **fat, salt, and sugar** are the best choices.

Ms. Lara tells **Anna** to think of a **snack** as a "mini-meal." A **snack** should fit in with the child's regular **meals**. For example, if Tim does not eat **fruits** or **vegetables** at **meals**, **Anna** could provide these **foods** as **snacks**. Or, **Anna** could save part of **Tim's** regular **meals**, such a half of a **sandwich** or **dessert**, and serve it as a **snack** between **meals**.

Ms. Lara recommends using **MyPyramid** when planning **snacks**. **Snacks** should be part of the day's **food** plan and fit into the five food groups in **MyPyramid**. There is no place for sweets in **MyPyramid**. Within each food group of **MyPyramid**, eat more of the basic foods with no added sugar and fat. Apples are good snacks that can be eaten often. Sweetened applesauce should be eaten sometimes. Apple pie, which has lots of sugar and fat, should be eaten sparingly. **Ms. Lara** says that a **healthful snack** can contain **foods** from more than one **food group**. For example, a **snack** of **carrots** and **celery** with **yogurt** dip contains **foods** from both the **milk** and **vegetable** groups. Table 1 shows some **healthful snacks** by **food group** in **MyPyramid**.

TABLE 1 Healthful Snacks by Food Group

Snack	Grain	Fruit	Vegetable	Milk	Meat & Beans
Apples and cheese		X		X	
Bagel and juice	X	X			
Cheese sandwich on whole wheat bread	X			X	
Crackers and cheese	X			X	
Graham crackers and milk	X			X	
Hard boiled egg and toast	X				X
Kabobs on toothpicks made from cheese, fruit, vegetables and sliced or cubed cooked meats (remove toothpicks before serving)		X	X	X	X
Low-fat ramen-style noodles or soup with added cooked vegetables	X		X		
Mini-pizza made from English muffins, pita bread, or rolls with spaghetti sauce, cheese and meat or vegetable toppings	X		X	X	X
Muffins made with carrots, zucchini, pumpkin, bananas, dates, or other fruits and vegetables	X	X	X		
Oranges and oatmeal muffins	X	X			
Peanut butter and banana or raisin sandwiches	X	X			X
Peanut butter crackers and milk	X			X	X
Pita bread stuffed with lean meat, tomato, and lettuce	X		X		X
Plain yogurt mixed with low-fat whipped topping and fruit		X		X	
Potato skins sprinkled with broccoli and cheese, broiled and topped with yogurt	X		X	X	
Pretzels and low-fat yogurt dip	X			X	
Rice cakes and peanut butter	X				X
Tortilla with fat-free mashed beans and cheese	X			X	X
Trail Mix (dried fruit, nuts, seeds, and unsweetened cereal)	X	X			X
Tuna fish and crackers	X				X
Unsweetened cereal with fruit and milk	X	X		X	
Waffle or pancake with fresh fruit	X	X			
Yogurt dip with raw vegetables or fruit		X	X	X	
Yogurt shake or parfait with fruit		X		X	

Ms. Lara gives **Anna** an alphabetical listing of **snacks**, seen in Table 2. She uses it to help **Tim** choose **healthy snacks** and learn his ABCs at the same time.

TABLE 2 Snacks from A to Z

A	Apples, Apricots
B	Banana, Bean Dip, Blueberry Bagels
C	Cantaloupe, Carrots, Celery, Cheese, Cucumbers
D	Dried Cereal, Dried Fruit Chips
E	Eggs
F	Fig Cookies, Frozen Fruit Bar, Fruit Kabobs
G	Graham Crackers, Granola Bars, Grapes
H	Honeydew Melon, Hot Chocolate
I	Ice Cream
J	Juices (100% juice), Jell-O with fruit
K	Kiwi Fruit, Krispy Rice Treats
L	Low-fat Pudding
M	Milk, Muffins
N	Nectarine, Nuts
O	Orange Wedges, Oatmeal
P	Pasta, Peaches, Pita Bread, Pretzels
Q	Quick Carrot Sticks
R	Raisins, Rice Cakes (any flavor)
S	Strawberries, Salsa Dip, Smoothie (with fruit)
T	Tortillas with filling, Trail Mix
U	Unbuttered Popcorn
V	Vanilla Wafers, Vegetables
W	Watermelon
X	eXciting Fruits and Vegetables
Y	Yogurt
Z	Zesty Crackers, Zucchini Slices

TIPS FOR PREPARING AND SERVING HEALTHFUL SNACKS

Ms. Lara gives **Anna** some ideas about **preparing** and serving **healthful snacks** for children. **Anna** makes a list of the tips.

1. Let children help shop for snacks at the grocery store. Although it's easier to shop without children, they do need to know how to make good snack choices. When you shop with children, give them choices rather than complete freedom. For example, ask them if they want to buy **bananas** or **apples**. Let them help choose or **weigh fruits** or **vegetables**. Ask them to choose a new kind of **cracker** or **bread** from several choices. Children are more likely to eat **snacks** they help choose.

2. Read labels on packaged foods. Check the **nutrition facts panel** to see which **nutrients** a **snack** contains. Read the list of **ingredients**. Avoid **snacks** that have **sugar**, **salt (sodium)**, or **oils** listed as the first few **ingredients**. Choose **foods** that are naturally low in **fat**, **salt**, and **sugar**. Look for **juices** that are 100% **juice**.

3. Choose kid-friendly snacks. Children like finger **foods** and fun **foods**. Serve bite-size **portions** of **fresh fruits** and **raw vegetables**. Cut sticks, wafers, or circles of **carrots**, **celery**, **cucumber**, **squash**, and **bell peppers**. Make sure that the **snacks** are age-appropriate. Never give children under 3 years of age foods that can cause them to choke, such as **nuts**, **peanut butter**, **hot dogs**,

raisins, popcorn, whole grapes, and carrot chunks. Arrange **foods** in fun designs or shapes such as a face or house. Give children small **portions** on small plates so that the **food** doesn't overwhelm them

4. Involve children in preparing healthful snacks. Younger children can **peel bananas**, put **bread** in a toaster, or arrange **fruits** and **vegetables** on a plate. Older children can make **sandwiches**, pour liquids, stir mixtures, and cut **fruits** and **vegetables**. Children who help prepare **snacks** are more likely to eat them.

5. Use appropriate sanitation and safety techniques when showing children how to prepare snacks. Teach children to wash their hands before handling **food** or equipment. Show older children how to prepare simple **recipes**. Remind them to keep handles of pots and pans turned away from the front of the stove. Teach them how to safely use the stove, oven, microwave, or other cooking appliance. Always stay in the kitchen with children while they are **preparing food**.

6. Make healthful snacks easily available. Set aside a "**snack spot**" in the refrigerator and cabinet. Keep the **snack** spot stocked with a variety of **nutritious** ready-to-eat **snacks** from each of the groups in MyPyramid. When **snacking**, children often reach for whatever is closest and easiest to get. If **healthful snacks** are readily available, children will be more likely to choose them. Limit eating to the kitchen and dining areas for all family members. This

practice is recommended by **health** care professionals to prevent **overeating** which can lead to **obesity**.

7. Offer a variety of foods. Offer **snacks** that vary in **texture** as well as taste.

If your child is thirsty, try **milk, vegetable juice, fruit juice, or water**. **Foods** that are smooth include **fruit smoothies, yogurt, cottage cheese,** and **bananas**. To satisfy the need to crunch on **foods**, provide **raw vegetables, popcorn, rice cakes, or crackers** to children over three years old. **Juicy foods** include **fresh fruit, tomatoes,** and **frozen juice pops**. Cold **foods** include **low-fat ice cream, frozen juice pops,** and **frozen fruits** such as **bananas, grapes,** or **berries**.

8. Don't be fooled by advertising. **Foods** advertised as **snack** items such as **potato chips, packaged sweets** such as **cakes** and **cookies**, and **fruit-flavored** and **carbonated soft drinks** are generally poor sources of **nutrition**.

9. Serve snacks at the right times. Offer **snacks** at regular times, such as mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Don't let children nibble throughout the day. If children are extremely hungry before a **meal**, let them eat their **salad** early or **snack** on **raw vegetables** or fruit that go with **lunch** or **dinner**.

10. Offer snacks that are alike. Let a child choose between two **fruits** or two plain **cookies** instead of choosing between **fruit** and **cookies**.

11. Plan ahead when going out. Pack **snacks** like **crackers**, **dried fruit**, and **juice** when going out. Such **snacks** are **healthier** and cheaper than those sold at **fast-food restaurants** or **concession stands**.

12. Use snacks to introduce new foods. When possible, include a game or activity to learn about the new **food**. Let the child help prepare it. Buy **fruits** and **vegetables in season**. Don't give up if the child doesn't like the new **food** the first time. Try it again prepared in a different way. Don't fight over **food** or punish your child for not eating a new **food**.

13. Set a good example. If your child sees you **snack** on **potato chips** and **carbonated soft drinks**, your child will want the same thing. When you eat **healthful snacks**, your child is more likely to eat these **foods**, too.

14. Never offer food as a reward for good behavior. This practice teaches children the wrong values about **food**. Focus on **food** as **nutrition** rather than as rewards.

Anna is glad she called **Ms. Lara**. Now she knows what to do. She and **Bill** will help **Tim** develop **healthful snacking** habits.