

# Children's Snacks



## *Snacks: Don't Ban Them, Plan Them*

Snacking is a major pastime for many American children - so much so that nearly one-fourth of kids' daily energy intake comes from nibbling between meals.

Much of this nibbling is on prepackaged snack foods, which are high in calories and low in nutrients. The popularity of these fattening treats may be one of the factors responsible for the country's childhood-obesity epidemic.

Take a typical snack for a toddler. A small box of animal crackers and a 6.75-ounce juice box have some 350 calories - about a third of the calories a 2-year-old needs in an entire day, WHICH ADDS UP. On average, the typical American 2-year-old consumes 1,200 calories a day. But he needs only 1,000.

But snacking itself isn't necessarily bad. The content of your child's snacks is what's most important. Providing healthy snack choices now will help our children learn to make healthy food choices in the future.

## *Snacks Are Essential*

Young children actually need snacks. Their stomachs are small, so they often can't get all the nutrients they need through meals alone. They need smaller portions of food more often. A good rule of thumb for toddler servings is about one tablespoon of food each year of age. You can always give them more if they are still hungry.

Children's growth rates slow down after their first birthday. Because they need fewer calories at this time, they eat less. Think of the snack, not as something that will spoil their meal but as part of their meal, and then readjust what and how much you serve -both for the snack and for the meal.

Nutritionists recommend that toddlers get three snacks a day; preschoolers and school age kids up to age 8, two; kids 9 and older, one. Certain foods may cause choking in younger children. Avoid feeding raw vegetables, popcorn, nuts and peanuts, dried fruits - such as raisins - to children under 3. Quarter hot dogs and bananas lengthwise and then cut into small pieces.

Calorie Count: shoot to keep your child's snacks to about 20 percent of his daily calories. For an active 5-year-old, who needs 1,400, that's 280 calories from snacks; a 2-year-old needs 1,000, so daily snacks total 200 calories. Try to keep snacks to about 100 calories.

Think of the snacks your child nibbles on in a new way: as mini meals; an opportunity to round out her diet with a variety of healthy foods she missed during mealtime.

### **So Make Snacks Nutritious! Such As:**

- Yogurt
- Baby carrots and cherry tomatoes
- Broccoli and cauliflower with low-fat ranch dip
- Peanut butter and whole grain crackers
- Low-fat string cheese
- Baked chips and salsa
- Low-fat Popcorn
- Low-fat chicken salad in whole-wheat pita
- Low-fat granola bars
- 1 milk and graham crackers
- Pretzels
- Fresh, frozen or canned fruit (in natural juice)
- Whole wheat Bagel or English muffin pizza
- Fruit Smoothie
- Cereal with 1 milk
- Whole Wheat Turkey sandwich
- Whole-grain grilled cheese (low-fat)

**And it just might get them snacking smart for a LIFETIME!**