

Snacks, Breakfast and Drinks for Children

Snacks: an important part of children's daily food intake

Healthy snacks throughout the day are an important part of a child's daily food intake. Children need to eat every few hours to keep up their energy levels and to ensure they have adequate nutrients – of concern is the type of food they eat, rather than how many times they eat food.

Often the types of foods chosen as snacks are low in dietary fibre and nutrients, and high in saturated fat and salt. Common examples are potato crisps and chocolate bars. Eating these foods occasionally is harmless. It's the frequent consumption of these types of foods that is a problem.

The easiest way to make sure that children choose healthier snacks is to provide them with plenty of choice – offer a range of snack options of varying colours, textures and flavours and try not to have less healthy snacks available in the home.

When preparing snacks for children, ensure you:

- choose plant-based foods, for example fruit, bread, vegetables;
- encourage children to understand a treat is an occasional rather than an everyday item;
- make water a regular drink, with soft drink or juice as an occasional option; and
- keep in mind that taste and interest are important factors in encouraging children to eat healthy snacks (offer snacks of varying colours, textures and flavours).



Examples of healthy snacks include:

- fresh fruit, fruit kebabs, canned fruit in natural juice, cooked fruit;
- vegetable sticks with reduced-fat dips, plain corn on the cob;
- homemade soup;
- reduced-fat yoghurt (natural or fruit);
- scones, pancakes or pikelets prepared with reduced-fat milk and margarine spread;
- bread, crumpets, English muffins, rice cakes, crispbreads or sandwiches;
- unsalted nuts (not suitable for children under five);
- dry biscuits with salad vegetables (for example tomato), reduced-fat cheese or dips.

Breakfast

Breakfast provides energy to get us through the day as well as essential vitamins and minerals. Eating breakfast can improve memory and problem-solving skills and improve creative thinking and concentration. With a healthy breakfast children have the energy to play, be alert, concentrate in class, and feel good about themselves.

A healthy breakfast can include almost any type of food – breads, cereals and grains, fruit, vegetables, reduced-fat dairy products and lean meats. What people eat at breakfast time depends on a number of factors including cultural background, religious beliefs, food preferences, and food and time available.

Examples of a healthy breakfast include:

- toast or fresh bread, with polyunsaturated or monounsaturated margarine spread plus a topping, such as jam, tomato, reduced-fat cheese, no-added-salt peanut butter or reduced-salt baked beans;
- breakfast cereal, reduced-fat milk and fruit;
- rice or noodles on their own or with lean meat or vegetables;
- reduced-fat yoghurt, fruit, bread.

It's a good idea to have a drink with breakfast. Suitable drinks include water, reduced-fat milk or tea. For those who don't have much of an appetite in the morning, offer a smoothie as an alternative to a 'solid' breakfast. Combine reduced-fat milk, reduced-fat yoghurt, fresh fruit, some honey and a handful of wheatgerm.



Drinks

It doesn't really matter how old you are, water is essential for life! Water is the preferred drink for children. While milk is important for an adequate calcium intake, too much can lead to poor appetite. Three serves of dairy products daily, including glasses of milk is recommended.

Children should be encouraged to eat whole fruit rather than drink fruit juices, and juices should be limited to one small glass per day. Of course, alcohol is not recommended for children.