

Healthy, Fun Snacks and Desserts for the Whole Family

By: Reyna Franco, MS, RD, CDN

Fueling Up Right

I am frequently asked "What should I give my child for a snack?" That is a great question because snacks are important, particularly for our busy children who participate in afterschool activities and weekend sports. Snacks are essential because they refuel our bodies and add nutrients that are needed for growth and health. With that in mind, we should feed our body with foods that prepare us for the next activity. For example, if your child is going from school to sports class, you will want to give him or her a snack that contains whole grains and a little protein.

Whole grains are carbohydrates that provide sustained energy for our body, and protein is necessary for growth and development. Examples of whole grains and protein foods include: peanut butter and all-fruit jelly sandwich on whole wheat bread and hummus on whole wheat pita bread or a spelt tortilla.

Choose Nutrient Dense Foods

If a child is going to a less strenuous activity, you may want to give him or her something that is nutrient dense. A nutrient dense food is one that is loaded with nutrients but not calories. Your child deserves the best so that they can be successful in their daily activities. Nutrient dense foods are packed with power!

- Examples include raw vegetables with hummus, salsa or bean dip, fresh fruit and low-fat or non-fat yogurt.
- Potato chips and corn chips are not nutrient dense. They are "empty calories" loaded with fat and contain no nutritional value. They are okay once in a while- for a birthday party or sleepover for instance, but should not be your everyday choice.

What About Desserts? Yes, Desserts Can Be Fun And Healthy!

- Instead of cookies or cake, try our family favorite, a fresh fruit parfait with yogurt.
- Sometimes add chocolate sauce and other times granola.
- Chocolate pudding made with low-fat or nonfat milk is always fun and provides much needed calcium.
- Fruit flavored milk shakes made with your child's favorite fruit and low-fat or nonfat milk are also calcium boosters. (Note: If you use soy milk, be certain that it is calcium fortified.)

Quick Mini Meals and Fresh Packed Snacks

What happens if you are not around to give your child a freshly made snack? A little bit of planning can go a long way. Use the "fresh snacks" and "backpack-ready snack" lists below when planning your child's snacks. Some of these snack items are packaged items that you will



find in the supermarket like those listed below. Read the label and avoid items that contain high fructose corn syrup, partially hydrogenated oils/trans fat, sugar listed as the first ingredient, or fat, cholesterol or sodium daily value greater than 10%. Here's to healthy snacking!

Fresh snacks (to be made at home and/or place in a freezer bag with an ice pack)

- Raw vegetables, such as celery, carrots, cauliflower, broccoli, green pepper, green beans, cucumbers, mushrooms or zucchini with hummus, salsa or bean dip.
- Whole wheat bread/pita with nut butter* or hummus.
- Whole wheat crackers with low fat cheese
- Whole wheat wrap with chicken breast, turkey, vegetables, nut butter or hummus.
- Low fat or nonfat yogurt with fruit (total 1 cup)
- Low fat (1%) or non-fat (Cabot brand tastes good) cottage cheese with fruit (total: 1 cup)
- Shakes with low fat or nonfat milk or yogurt and fruit (1 cup)
- Pre-portioned low-fat or non-fat pudding (1 individual serving)
- Pre-portioned oatmeal made with non-fat or low-fat milk and 1/2 cup raisins
- Mozzarella "string-cheese"
- Hard boiled egg

Backpack Ready (will stay fresh all day without refrigeration)

- Raw vegetables
- Fresh fruit such as apples, oranges, bananas, peaches, grapefruit, grapes, melons, pears, plums or strawberries.
- Pre-packaged all natural applesauce
- Pre-packaged unsweetened fruit juice (1/2 cup)
- Dried fruit (1/4 cup) or dried vegetables (1/2 cup)
- Nuts* (1 oz)
- Pretzels (1 oz)
- Rice cakes (2)
- Whole grain fig cookies (example, Fig Newmans) (2)
- Graham crackers (2)
- Whole grain cereal (3/4 cup)
- Whole grain granola bars (example, Kashi brand)

Reyna Franco, MS, MBA, RD, CDN is a Nutrition and Exercise Consultant with a private practice in New York City. She counsels individuals and groups on issues such as weight loss, eating disorders, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, women's health concerns, pediatrics, and sports nutrition. To learn more about her, visit her website at www.reynafranco.com or email her at reyna@reynafranco.com.

