

snack right!

BY KAREN ANSEL, MS, RD

kids seem to be born to snack.

That's okay - snacks are actually an important energy and nutrient source for busy, growing bodies with small stomachs. So why has snacking gotten such a bad rap? More often than not, the snacks we choose are full of empty calories, which fill our kids up and offer little nutrition. Snacks don't have to sideline a healthy diet. In fact, they can actually be a great tasting way to help your kids get the nutrients and energy they need.

keep it healthy

Steer clear of the junk food trap by planning snacks ahead of time. Think of

snack time as a great opportunity to work in some fruits, vegetables and high calcium foods. When choosing snacks, aim for a well-balanced mini-meal by rounding out a complex carbohydrate based snack with a little fat or protein for added staying power.

Look for whole foods rather than prepackaged snack foods that are filled with simple sugars and unhealthful fats. How about some fresh fruit and cheese or a slice of banana or zucchini bread with a glass of milk?

time it right

The best time for a snack is about two to three hours after a meal, when energy stores start to run low. To keep snacking from sabotaging mealtime, keep snacks small and limit them to two hours or more before meals.

keep it simple

For children under the age of three, the best snacks are simple ones like yogurt, graham crackers and milk, fresh fruit and sliced cheese or mini-muffins. Be sure to avoid foods that might cause choking like nuts, raisins, cubed cheese, whole grapes, and crunchy raw vegetables.

For older kids, have some fun! Have them help you make healthy snacks like tortilla roll-ups with low fat cheese and salsa. Or how about whipping up a yogurt/fruit smoothie together and letting them pick out their favorite fruits? Do your kids love to bake? Try making some homemade oatmeal raisin cookies and serve with a tall glass of milk.

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