Get Up & Move!

Parent Newsletter Series 3: October

Snacking is important for children and adolescents to help meet their energy and nutrient needs for growth and development. However, many parents and health professionals are concerned that snacking is undermining the nutritional quality of children’s diets and contributing to children becoming overweight or obese.

Because of young children’s high energy needs, their stomachs' small capacity for food, and their fluctuating appetites, young children need to eat 4 to 6 times a day. However, if children are allowed unrestricted access to snacks, nutrition problems such as excess calorie intake, weight gain, inability to distinguish hunger and fullness, and inadequate nutrient intake may result. To ensure that snacking is nourishing without being a source of excess calories, parents should be aware of when and where children snack and what snacks they consume. Snacks should be offered to children at regularly scheduled times of the day, preferably a couple of hours before the next meal to stave off hunger and avoid spoiling their appetites. At home, snacks should be consumed at a designated place and, to avoid mindless overeating, not consumed while watching television or engaged in other activities.

Snack food choices can affect children’s nutrient intake and ultimately their health. Many popular snack foods consumed by children include chips, candy, cookies, and soft drinks. Because these foods can be high in calories, fat, sugar, and/or salt and low in essential nutrients such as calcium, they should be eaten sparingly.

When offering snacks to children, the best approach is to provide a variety of foods from the food groups of MyPyramid - the Milk, Meat/Beans, Vegetable, Fruit, and Grain groups. Parents need to make healthful snacks readily available in children’s environment. For healthful snack ideas, see http://www.nutritionexplorations.org. Snacks should supplement, not replace, meals for children and be offered in appropriate serving sizes.

(Source: www.nationaldairycouncil.org)

Healthy Family Snacking Tips

- Keep bowls or baggies of cut-up fruits and vegetables in the refrigerator for easy access by children. You might be surprised that kids will eat them more often that way!
- Set up a consistent time for snacking. Stick to it!
- Eat at the table for snack time, not in front of the TV.
• Watch out for unhealthy snacking behaviors – snacking while reading or watching TV, snacking when bored or unhappy, or snacking too close to meal times.
• Don’t “ban” the potato chips and candy! Just allow children to have them in moderation and only once in awhile!

Some ideas for healthy snacks from the National Dairy Council
Before serving these snacks, please be aware of any food allergies your children may have!

Fruit 'n Milk — Enjoy a bowl of sliced bananas, peaches or nectarines, or berries topped with low-fat milk and a sprinkle of sugar.

Fruit Slush — Blend 3/4 cup of frozen fruit, such as strawberries, bananas or mangos, with 1/2 cup of low-fat milk or vanilla yogurt. Sweeten with 1-2 teaspoons of sugar to taste.

Crunchy Yogurt — Stir 2 to 3 tablespoons of low-fat granola or other whole-grain cereal into a container of low-fat, flavored yogurt.

Salad in a Bag — Place greens and other cut vegetables in a zipper-lock baggie. Add shredded cheese and a small amount of low-fat salad dressing and croutons. Close and "toss." Eat the salad out of the bag with a fork.

Pizza Party — Spread toasted English muffins, French bread or mini bagels with prepared pizza sauce. Add kids’ favorites such as peppers, onions, olives, Canadian bacon, pineapple, broccoli or spinach, and mozzarella, feta or Parmesan cheese. Cook in toaster oven at 350 degrees F until cheese melts.

Nacho Ordinary Snack — Sprinkle baked tortilla chips with pre-shredded cheese. Heat in the microwave oven until cheese melts. Serve with salsa for vitamin C.

Wrap and Roll — Roll kids' favorite cheese and lean meat in a tortilla spread with low-fat ranch dressing; cut into bite-size portions.

Flavor the Grains — Serve unsweetened cereal with strawberry, chocolate or even orange flavored milk.

Chocolate Peanut Butter Cup — Blend 3/4 cup low-fat chocolate milk with 1 tablespoon creamy peanut butter and a small scoop of frozen, low-fat vanilla yogurt.