

Say Yes to Healthy Snacks!



Snacks are an important part of children's daily nutrition in child care as well as at home. In planning healthy snacks, consider food safety and known allergies as well as "snack appeal!"

Serve snacks from a variety of food groups

Grains and carbohydrates. Children will enjoy these snacks as part of the 6 servings needed each day: crackers with cheese spread, ready-to-eat cereal, mini rice cakes, and graham crackers. Older children may enjoy trail mix or popcorn (but be careful—these foods can cause choking in children ages 3 and under).

Vegetables. Snacks can be a good way to work 3 servings of these foods into a child's daily diet. Try vegetable strips, such as cucumber or squash, cherry tomatoes cut into small pieces, steamed broccoli or carrots, green beans, or sugar peas with a low-fat dip. Older children may also like carrot or celery strips, perhaps with peanut butter.

Fruit. Sections of fruit (apples, tangerines, bananas, or pineapples), canned fruits, and juices are good choices. A child needs 2 servings of fruit each day, but be careful not to overdo the juice. A serving for 4- to 6-year-olds is $\frac{3}{4}$ cup.

Milk products. Some good choices include milk shakes made with fruit, cheese slices or string cheese, and mini yogurt cups. One cup of milk or 2 ounces of cheese makes up 1 of the 2 servings young children should have each day.

Meat and protein. Children may enjoy hard-cooked eggs; peanut butter spread thinly on crackers, fruit, or vegetables; or bean dip thinly spread on crackers. Two to 3 ounces of meat, 1 egg, or 2 tablespoons of peanut butter count as 1 of the 2 recommended daily servings of meat or protein recommended for children ages 2 to 6.

Sweet and high-fat foods. Everyone enjoys an occasional treat, but try to limit the number of these foods in your children's diets. Eating these foods may keep a child from eating the foods he needs and can lead to overeating.

Take safety precautions in serving food

Watch out for foods that may cause choking, including hot dogs, meat chunks, chips, nuts and seeds, popcorn, raisins, grapes, cherries, marshmallows, pretzels, large chunks of fruit or raw vegetables, peanut butter (when eaten by the spoonful), and round or hard candy. Some of these foods (like grapes or cherries) can be served if they are cut into small pieces. Peanut butter can be spread thinly on crackers or bread. Children love finger foods!

Know your child's allergies. Be sure that anyone who cares for your child is aware of her allergies and reports any allergic reactions to you. Severe reactions can be life-threatening and may require emergency medical attention.

For related Web resources, see "Say Yes to Healthy Snacks" at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.



29 Children's Research Center
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469
Telephone: 217-333-1386 • Fax: 217-244-7732
Toll-free: 877-275-3227 (Voice/TTY)
Email: iel@uiuc.edu
Internet: <http://illinoisearlylearning.org>

Illinois State Board of Education

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