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Healthful Snacks for Children Two to Five Years of Age

This guide discusses the benefits of providing snacks to young children and shares ideas for what good snacks are for these children.

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Why do children two to five years of age need snacks?

Snacks are an important part of children's daily food intake. It is difficult for children to get all the nutrients they need to promote growth and development in three meals a day. Also, most children need snacks because they get hungry between meals. Well-chosen snacks can help supply nutrients and energy needs (calories).

As a parent you may say, "My children do not need any more calories, they are overweight." Even children who are large for their age need snacks between meals. Every child can benefit from low-calorie snacks in terms of nutrients and satisfying their hunger.

Children two to five years of age need two planned snacks each day. Try to establish a regular snack time. Schedule snacks two hours before a meal.

Plan your children's snacks using the Food Guide Pyramid.

Keep a record of what your child eats for two or three days. Using the form in this NebGuide, compare

what your child eats with the foods listed on the Food Guide Pyramid. Are you offering your child the number of recommended servings from each food group? If your child is lacking in the recommended servings from a specific food group, you could add foods from that group in your planning for healthy snacks.

What are nutritious snack foods? Any food supplying several nutrients and calories. Set a goal to include two food choices from two food groups in planning a snack. Examples would be: apple slices and cheese sticks; orange slices and oatmeal squares; frozen fruit juice cups with vanilla wafers; and peanut butter popovers with milk.

Involve your child in preparing snacks.

Children want to be involved in preparing snacks. There are many things children can help with, for example, two-year-olds can peel bananas, put bread in a toaster, arrange apple and cheese slices; three- to five-year-olds can cut soft foods such as oatmeal squares with a table knife, make sandwiches, pour liquids, shape dough, measure dry and liquid foods.

When your child is helping you with food preparation, don't forget sanitation. Washing hands before handling food or equipment to fix food is an important lesson for young children. Learning to use a clean spoon each time food is tasted during food preparation is another important lesson for children to learn.

Safety is always a consideration when a child is in the kitchen. Keep handles of pots and pans turned away from the front of the stove so they don't stick out over the edge. Little hands can reach up and catch hold of a handle sticking out, or the handle can be bumped and hot food spilled. Stay with young children in the kitchen while preparing food.

Food record form for keeping a record of what your child eats for one day.

Some foods you offer to your child may be in more than one food group. If it is a large-size portion count it for both food groups or decide which group it would fit into best. **The dark lines indicate the number of servings that should ideally be offered to your child each day, meals and snacks included.**

Snack Ideas:

Foods from the bread, cereal, rice and pasta food group

- Ready-to-eat breakfast cereals -- served with milk or fruit juice
- Rice cakes and crackers -- served with cheese as a topping
- Bran or whole wheat muffins -- with fresh, frozen, or canned fruit
- Quick breads -- made with vegetables such as sweet potatoes or pumpkin
- Breads of all kinds such as multi-grain, rye, white, wheat
- Rice balls -- with meat as a filling
- Tortillas -- spread with fat free mashed beans, rolled up and slices into sections
- Oatmeal cookies -- with a serving of milk
- Bagel half -- with cheese wedges

Foods chosen from this food group will provide complex carbohydrates (starches), vitamins, minerals, and fibers. The Food Guide Pyramid suggests 6 to 11 servings of these foods a day.

Foods from the vegetable food group

- Slightly cooked vegetable sticks such as carrot sticks, cucumber and squash sticks --with a serving of cottage cheese dip and crackers (Remember that children are at risk for choking on raw carrots and celery.) Carrots should be quartered lengthwise and sliced into several pieces and slightly cooked.
- Tomato wedges, broccoli and cauliflower florets -- with a serving of bean dip
- Thin slices of baked sweet potatoes/white potatoes -- with a serving of milk

Foods chosen from this food group will provide vitamins, such as vitamins A and C, and folate, and minerals, such as iron and magnesium. They are naturally low in fat and also provide fiber. The Food Guide Pyramid suggest 3 to 5 servings of these foods a day.

Foods from the fruit food group

- Wedges of fresh fruits such as oranges, apples, bananas, pears -- served with finger sandwiches
- Fruit sauces made from apples, apricots, pineapples -- with a serving of oatmeal bars
- Canned fruits (those packed in juice) -- with a serving of a bread such as a pancake

Foods chosen from this food group will provide important amounts of vitamin A and C and potassium. They are naturally low in fat and sodium. The Food Guide Pyramid suggest 2 to 4 servings of these foods a day.

Foods from the milk, yogurt and cheese group

- Milk shakes -- made with fruit and milk
- Yogurt shakes -- made with fruit and yogurt
- Melted cheese on toast
- Yogurt sundae -- topped with fruit
- Choose lowfat cheeses and lowfat milk when available. Cottage cheese is lower in calcium than most cheeses. One and one half ounces to two ounces of cheese and has about the same calcium as eight ounces of yogurt or one cup of milk.

Foods chosen from this food group will provide protein, vitamins, and minerals. Milk, yogurt, and cheese are the best source of calcium. The Food Guide Pyramid suggests 2 to 3 servings of milk, yogurt, and cheese a day.

Foods from the meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, and eggs group

- Meat and poultry -- strips of roast beef, chicken, or ham can be eaten as is or in finger sandwiches. Luncheon meats are usually quick, but expensive and many are high in sodium and fat.
- Canned tuna fish -- an item that can be stored at home and be available for quick preparation.
- Remember to choose lean cuts of meat. Prepare meats in lowfat ways by trimming away all of the fat that you can see and broiling, roasting, or boiling instead of frying.
- Nuts and seeds are also in this food group. Avoid whole nuts and seeds for young children because they have been known to cause choking.

Foods chosen from this food group will provide protein, B vitamins, iron, and zinc. The Food Guide Pyramid suggests 2 to 3 servings each day of foods from this group.

Snacks you can make with your child

Snack Recipes

APPLE-OAT SQUARES	
2 cups oatmeal, quick or old fashioned 1 1/2 cups enriched flour 3/4 cup melted margarine 1 cup firmly packed brown sugar 1 1/4 teaspoons cinnamon 1/2 teaspoon baking soda 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg 1 1/3 cups applesauce 1/2 cup finely chopped nuts (optional)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heat oven to 375 degrees and grease a 9 x 13 inch pan. 2. Combine all ingredients except applesauce and nuts. 3. Mix until crumbly; reserve 1 cup of the mixture. 4. Press remaining mixture in bottom of greased pan. 5. Bake 15 minutes; cool slightly about 10 minutes. 6. Spread applesauce over partially baked crust and sprinkle with nuts. 7. Top with reserved mixture and bake 15 to 20 minutes or until golden brown. 8. Cool in pan. 9. Cut into 2 inch squares. <p>Yield: 24 servings Serving size: 2" x 2" squares Snack Suggestion: One apple-oat square and 1/2 cup of orange juice <i>(A child can help pack the brown sugar, measure ingredients, and cut into squares with a table knife.)</i></p>

ZUCCHINI CARROT COOKIES	
3/4 cup margarine 3/4 cup sugar 1 egg 1 teaspoon vanilla 2 1/2 cups enriched flour 2 teaspoon baking powder 1/2 teaspoon soda 2 teaspoons cinnamon 1 cup shredded zucchini 1/2 cup shredded carrots	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cream the margarine and sugar. 2. Add the egg and vanilla; mix well. 3. Add the shredded vegetables and mix. 4. Combine the dry ingredients in a bowl. 5. Add the dry ingredients to the creamed mixture; mix thoroughly. 6. Drop the dough by teaspoonful onto an ungreased baking sheet. 7. Bake at 350 degrees for 10 to 12 minutes. <p>Yield: 30 servings Serving size: 1 cookie Snack Suggestion: One zucchini carrot cookie and 1/2 cup milk <i>(A child can help measure ingredients and drop dough by teaspoonful onto the baking sheet.)</i></p>

FRUIT JUICE POPS	
1 (6 ounce) can frozen juice concentrate (100% juice) 2 cups plain yogurt 2 teaspoons vanilla 6 (5 ounce) paper cups 6 wooden sticks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mix all ingredients together in a medium bowl. 2. Pour the mixture into six (5 ounce) paper cups (generous 1/3 cup mixture per paper cup). 3. Insert a wooden stick for a handle. 4. Cover and freeze until firm. <p>NOTE: To remove a pop, hold the paper cup under tap water for a few seconds.</p> <p>Yield: 6 servings Serving size: 1 fruit juice pop Snack Suggestion: One fruit juice pop and four vanilla wafers <i>(A child can help measure ingredients, insert wooden sticks and arrange paper cups.)</i></p>

PEANUT BUTTER POPOVERS	
1 can (10) refrigerated buttermilk biscuits 10 teaspoons peanut butter 10 teaspoons fruit preserves	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lay biscuits on cookie sheet. 2. Put 1 teaspoon peanut butter and 1 teaspoon fruit preserves on each biscuit. 3. Fold over each biscuit and pinch ends together tight to seal in filling. 4. Bake in preheated oven at 425 degrees for 10 to 12 minutes. <p>Yield: 10 servings Serving size: 1 popover Snack Suggestion: One peanut butter popover and 1/2 cup of milk <i>(A child can arrange biscuits on the cookie sheet, spoon peanut butter and fruit preserves on biscuits, and help pinch ends together.)</i></p>

POTATO PUFFS	
1/2 cup mashed potatoes 1 egg 1 teaspoon baking powder Pinch salt 2 tablespoons sugar 1 1/2 cups enriched flour	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beat egg into mashed potatoes. 2. Add other ingredients. 3. Drop by tablespoonful into a small amount of hot oil. 4. Fry until light brown. 5. Roll in sugar. <p>NOTE: These are similar to donut holes. This is one way to use leftover mashed potatoes.</p> <p>Yield: 12 servings Serving size: 1 potato puff Snack Suggestion: One potato puff and 1/2 cup of sliced peaches <i>(A child can help measure ingredients and roll in sugar.)</i></p>

APPLE COOKIES	
1/2 cup margarine 1/2 cup sugar 1/2 cup brown sugar 1 teaspoon cloves 1 teaspoon cinnamon 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg 2 cups enriched flour 1 teaspoon soda 1 cup chopped and pared apples 1/4 cup apple juice or milk 1 egg 1/2 cup golden raisins (optional)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Combine margarine, sugars, cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg. 2. Sift flour with soda. 3. Add 1/2 of flour mixture to margarine mixture and blend. 4. Stir in apples, raisins, apple juice or milk, and egg. 5. Add the remaining flour; mix. 6. Drop by teaspoonful onto greased cookie sheet. 7. Bake at 400 degrees for 11 to 14 minutes. 8. Remove from cookie sheet while hot. <p>Optional: Spread with a thin glaze of powdered sugar and vanilla.</p> <p>Yield: 30 servings Serving size: 1 cookie Snack Suggestion: One apple cookie and 1/2 cup of chocolate milk <i>(A child can help measure ingredients and drop dough by teaspoonful onto the baking sheet.)</i></p>

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