



Snacking made HEALTHY!

By Heidi Du Preez

Children are grazers and therefore prefer to eat regularly, rather than only three big meals per day. It is good for them to snack during the day, but make sure the

snacks are healthy and that they still enjoy their three balanced main meals.

Their overall diet should be balanced with 30% complex carbohydrates, 40% fruits and vegetables, 20% protein and 10% fats and oils. Good examples of complex carbohydrates would be butternut, sweet potato, potato with its skin, brown rice and whole grains like whole wheat, stone-ground flours, oats, barley and sorghum. Protein food will include free-range eggs, organic dairy products, free-range chicken and beef, lamb, venison and fish. Good fats and oils will be avocado, extra-virgin olive oil, seed and nuts. The bulk of their healthy balanced diet should comprise of fruits and vegetables, with the emphasis on the veggies!

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day, so make sure it is properly balanced with a protein food and not laden with sugar. Boxed cereals are far from the ideal start for their day.

The most popular snack foods are crisps, choc lates, biscuits, energy or cereal bars and baked products like muffins or pies. These foods are high in the wrong kind of fat, the wrong kinds of carbohydrates, salt and additives, while not providing the nutrients your children need.

Overconsumption of crisps and similar processed snack foods greatly contributes to the epidemics of obesity and type II diabetes, among other diseases in our society, particularly in children.

Make sure the snack products that you offer to your kids are free of flavourants, preservatives and colourants like MSG (monosodium glutamate), sodium benzoate (E211), sunset yellow FCF (E110), quinoline yellow (E104), carmoisine (E122), allura red (E129)

and ponceau 4R (E124) – these have all been linked to hyperactivity, among many other symptoms, in children. A plausible connection to tantrums, poor concentration and slow progress at school has been found if these additives are consumed. As a rule of thumb, don't buy any processed product that has more than two ingredients listed on the label, which you are not familiar with. Therefore stick to foods as close to their natural state as possible.

Ideally each snack should contain some form of protein to balance blood sugar levels. Good examples would be:

- A handful of seeds or nuts, mixed with sulphur-free, chopped dried fruit like dates, figs, mango or apricots
- Trail mix – see recipe
- Muesli bar; free of excess sugars
- Fresh fruit plus a handful of almonds
- Smoothie – see recipe
- Crudités (veggie sticks) with a nice dip – see recipe for Cashew dip
- Plain yoghurt and chopped fresh fruit, sprinkled with seeds and / or nuts
- Popcorn flavoured with a little herbal, sea or rock salt
- Venison or free-range beef fat-free biltong plus a fresh fruit
- Rye, rice or corn crisp bread or cakes with any of the following toppings: avocado; cottage cheese; cucumber or sardine spread (see recipe)
- Healthy sandwich made with rye or whole wheat bread
- Date balls



Water should be the main drink served to kids at snack times. It does not contain the sugars, calories, colourants and caffeine of sodas. If you do serve fruit juice, always dilute it with at least 50:50 water and ideally only use freshly-squeezed fruit juice. Children should consume 60ml / kg body weight liquid each day. Most people translate thirst as hunger; therefore first offer a drink before you give your child a snack. They may just be thirsty!

Most of the snacks served to children should be fruits and vegetables, since



most kids do not eat the recommended five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Eating fruits and vegetables lowers the risk of heart disease, cancer, and high blood pressure. Fruits and vegetables contain important nutrients and fibre. Though some think fruits and vegetables are costly snacks, they are actually less costly than many other less healthy snacks on a per-serving basis. An apple cost much less than a packet of crisps! Serving fresh fruits and vegetables can seem challenging, but be innovative and creative. Stick a tooth pick into cut up fruit or make fruit kebabs by arranging cut



pieces of fruit onto a skewer: However, dipping carrots into chocolate will be defeating the objective!

Serve healthy snacks with fun plates, napkins, cups, or straws or have a tasting party where children can vote for their favourite healthy snacks.

You as parents may not be able to control what is sold or offered to your kid's at school, but you can certainly instil good health habits in them while they are at home, especially if you lead by example.

Heidi du Preez is Nutritional Therapist and is registered as a Professional Natural Scientist. She obtained her masters degree in Food Science and is currently specialising in Nutritional Medicine. Heidi consults to both the food and health industry. She uses a functional biomedical approach, incorporating diet, supplementation, detoxification and spiritual well-being into her treatment regimen. Her focus is on the prevention and cure of chronic, metabolic and degenerative diseases. Heidi is on the Council of The South African Association for Nutritional Therapy (www.saant.org.za). She serves on the panel of experts of The South African Journal of Natural Medicine for whom she regularly writes articles and is also the author of the health recipe book Natural Medicine Magazine's Wholefood Cook Book (www.naturalnutrition.co.za).