

# Smart SNACKING

Healthy snacks are a great way for people of all ages to meet their daily nutritional needs. According to the American Dietetic Association, the “Top 3 Snack Mistakes Parents Make”:

- 1) Thinking that snacking is a bad habit
- 2) Letting kids eat whatever they want
- 3) Not planning snacks

Snacks can play an important role in managing hunger and providing energy between meals. They can boost your child’s mental and physical skills, which will help them stay focused on homework and other after school commitments like sports practices. A well-timed snack, at least two hours before a meal, can even reduce overeating at mealtime.

With their children’s input parents can come up with a list of healthy snack options, and make sure the foods are on hand. If favorites are higher in sugar and fat, for example, chips, cookies and candy, set guidelines on how often these foods are allowed, or buy in smaller quantities or portions. Keep in mind that forbidden foods are often more appealing. Try healthier alternatives like graham crackers or baked chips.

Plan to keep snack foods easily available, especially if children are choosing their own snack. Try packing a snack box or having a snack shelf with foods that don’t need to be refrigerated such as dried fruits, whole grain cereal and crackers, pretzels, microwave popcorn, peanut butter, shelf stable pudding cups, etc. Refrigerated options are low fat yogurt, string cheese, fresh fruit and cut up vegetables and low fat dip.

If your child or teen stays after school for an activity, snacks brought from home will usually be healthier than what is available in a vending machine. Pack snacks like peanut butter and whole grain crackers, dry cereal, homemade snack and trail mixes, granola or cereal bars, pretzels, nuts, dried fruit, fresh fruit, individual fruit cups and an extra water bottle.

There is a place for snacks in a healthy eating plan. You can encourage healthy snacking by having a structured snack schedule and making nutritious foods available.