



How to Really Make Snacks Count

Michelle Moskowitz Brown, Local Matters



In my professional life at Local Matters, I champion the integration of healthful foods in every aspect of life, including at home, at school and within institutions. My kids, Norah, 7 and Max, 10, are so used to my advocacy that if they want to get my goat, they joke that they're going to McDonald's. Luckily for me, Max went once with a friend and never wants to go back.

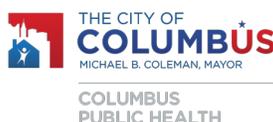
In the centers and schools where we teach Food Matters classes, children may have never eaten a carrot, a tomato, or, dare I say it... a green smoothie. That is why food education, at the earliest stages, is so important. Our Food Matters class is a hands-on program that engages children from the Pre-K set upwards to high school in understanding where food comes from, how to grow it and how to prepare it. Each week, they get to try healthy alternatives to junk food snacks, and we share information with their parents.

As a parent, I know it can seem difficult to "Make Snacks Count." However, snacks are a great way to incorporate more fruits and veggies, rather than trying to recreate the five components of the food plate at every meal. For example, if a child has a snack of apples and peanut butter, your next meal can just cover a veggie, dairy and grain (cheese quesadilla with broccoli perhaps). This is the "two, three concept" and it offers flexibility to a well-rounded diet.

Snacks do not need to be overly complicated. Whole foods like apples, oranges, and cheese slices take little to no preparation and make a good, quick snack in between meals. Rather than viewing snacks as a roadblock to meals, saying that kids will be too full for dinner, you can view snacks as a segway to a meal. With appropriate portion sizes, snacks will supplement meals. It is also an opportunity to have fun and try new things as a family.

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