Quick Tips for Healthy Snacking at All Ages

These handouts give quick tips according to each age group of children. It is important to note that infants, toddlers, pre-school, school-aged and teens have different needs dependent on their level of activity.

Infants 0-12 Months

Setting up a Lactation Room

Breastfeeding mothers need a clean, private space to feed their children and express milk. The space should include: electrical outlet, comfortable chair and nearby access to running water.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends breastfeeding as the sole source of nutrition for your baby for about 6 months. When you add solid foods to your baby's diet, continue breastfeeding until at least 12 months. You can continue to breastfeed after 12 months if you and your baby desire.

Starting Solid Foods

The AAP recommends introducing solid foods between 4 and 6 months of age following these guidelines:

• The baby should be able to sit up with good head control.

• If the baby turns his/her head away from food, it may be a sign he/she is not ready for solid foods. Try again in 1-2 weeks.

• If the baby pushes food out of his/her mouth, he/she may not yet be able to move food through the mouth to the throat for swallowing. This is a normal step in development and takes some practice.

• Try diluting the food first, then gradually thickening the texture.

• You may also wait and retry solids in 1-2 weeks.

Solid Foods to Try First

• Single grain baby cereal is a good choice for the first solid food.

• Choose cereal made for babies and iron-fortified.

• Baby cereals are available pre-mixed or dry.

• Follow packaged directions for preparation.

• You can mix dry cereal with breast milk, formula or water.
Introducing New Foods

Try one new food at a time. Wait at least 2 to 3 days before starting another. With each new food introduced, watch for any allergic reactions (diarrhea, rash, or vomiting). If any of these occur, stop using the new food and consult with the child's doctor.

Within a few months of starting solid foods, the baby's daily diet should include a variety of foods each day that may include: breast milk and/or formula, meats, and cereal

Moving on to Finger Foods

Once babies can sit up and bring their hands and objects to their mouth, you can give them finger foods to help them learn to feed themselves. Avoid choking by adding soft, easy-to-swallow foods in bite-sized pieces such as:

• Small pieces of banana
• Wafer-type crackers
• Scrambled eggs
• Well-cooked pasta
• Well-cooked chicken finely chopped
• Well-cooked and cut up yellow squash, peas, and potatoes

Do not give babies any food that requires chewing or can be a choking hazard, including hot dogs and meat sticks; nuts and seeds; chunks of meat or cheese; whole grapes; popcorn; chunks of peanut butter; raw vegetables; fruit chunks, such as apple chunks; and hard, gooey, or sticky candy.

Should I give babies juice?

Children do not need juice.

• Babies younger than 6 months should not be given juice.
• If desired, a child can be given 100% fruit juice after 6 months of age.
• Only offer juice in a cup, never in a bottle.
• Limit juice to 4 ounces a day. More than this will reduce his/her appetite for more nutritious foods.
• Juice can cause diaper rash, diarrhea, weight gain and tooth decay.

Adapted from: American Academy of Pediatrics
**Toddlers**

- Belly size of a fist, adults the size of football
- Caregivers should provide structure to their toddler's day, including predictable meal and snack times.
- Most toddlers need three meals and two snacks per day.
- Caregivers should make sure that the feeding environment is safe by having their child seated when it is time to eat.
- At this age, make sure to present food in a form/size that they can handle safely. This means making sure to cut things up in small pieces and avoiding food that might promote choking. It also means avoiding foods that are hard or tough and difficult to chew.
- Make sure that you offer healthy choices at all meals and snacks. Toddlers are unpredictable and you should look at every meal and snack as an opportunity to get healthy, nutritious food into them.
- Don't stop offering a certain food because the last time they didn't like it. Their tastes change over time.
- Sit and eat with your toddler. Toddlers are much more likely to eat and less likely to feel pressure if people around them are also eating.
- Set a good example by demonstrating good table manners and healthy eating habits. If a toddler doesn't see adults, eating vegetables, they are much less likely to try them.
- Accept the mess.
- Don't become a short order cook or you may continue to be one for the rest of your child's life. If your toddler decides not to eat what you offer, that is fine. They can wait until the next meal or snack (when they are good and hungry) to be offered food again.
• Don’t allow panhandling for food between scheduled meal and snack times. If you do, you will sabotage your own meal and snack structure.
• Water is all that they should be offered between meals and snacks. This is also important for dental health.
• Turn off any distractions (TV, DVDs, smart phones etc.). Help your toddler learn to pay attention to her eating and hunger. Mealtime is family social time.
• Teach counting while snacking you can use their age as a guideline for skills and portion control - for example, a 3-year-old child can be allowed three animal crackers, sliced grapes etc.
• Repeatedly offer infants and toddlers foods that are naturally low in salt and added sugars, as well as fruits and vegetables without added sugar, salt or sauces, as often as possible.
Preschoolers

• Even though Preschoolers are much smaller than adults, pound-for-pound their total calorie needs are comparable.
• Young children’s stomachs are not large enough to get enough calories from only three meals a day. They need constant refueling throughout the day. They may need three meals and two snacks a day.
• Control is still a key issue at this age, so try giving choices of snacks from the options you present.
• The desire for sweets can be quite strong at this age, but you can avoid the struggles. Don’t offer candy and cookies at snack time.
• Preschoolers are just learning to label their feelings and they’ll often say, “I’m hungry.” But they could just be bored, tired, or in need of some attention. Figure out what your child really needs. It may be that some playtime with you or a change of scenery could end the cries of “I’m hungry.”
• Make sure it’s eaten at the table and not in front of the TV because it causes bad habits and overeating.
Teens

• During the teen years, calorie needs are at an all-time high, especially for boys. Rapid growth spurts, intense sports workouts, and staying up later at night leave teens ravenous.
• Unplanned, random snacking can lead to problems, especially with weight.
• Nonstop snacking interferes with kids’ appetites and can disrupt their natural instinct to experience hunger and fullness.
• Healthy snacks can actually help kids achieve a healthy weight when they are timed correctly.
• Most teens need to eat every three to four hours throughout the day.
• Teens might still need a snack or two during the day, but what they eat may seem out of your control. Your teen might have activities, sports, a job, social commitments, money to spend, and car keys, so there is no way to control what your teen eats. But, you can encourage healthy snacking by keeping nutritious foods at home that your teen can take along.
• Healthy snacks for teens include:
  • veggie sticks with low-fat ranch dip or hummus
  • low-fat granola bars
  • fresh or dried fruit
  • trail mix
  • air-popped popcorn (not microwave)
  • hard-boiled eggs