

Parent Communications— Balanced Diet Theme

Adapted from President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2006, Food & Fun After School Unit 6 Parent Communications.

Newsletter article: Use this *Planet Health* article in your class or school newsletter. Think about publishing a *Planet Health* message each month to help parents and students tune in to healthy lifestyle choices and tune out of screen time.

Snacking the Healthy Way

For growing children, snack time is not only enjoyable but also necessary. According to children's health experts, snacking is an important part of the diet for children, contributing almost a quarter of the day's calories. So it's important to make sure that snack foods are nutritious, not just tasty. This can be tricky when so many children ask for foods that are high on flavor (from all the fat and sugar) but low on nutrition.

What makes a healthy snack? Think "minimeal" instead of the chips, soda, and cookies that food manufacturers advertise as snack foods. Here are some qualities to keep in mind when planning and purchasing foods to serve between meals.

- Mix it up! Choose foods from at least two of the food groups. An example of a snack is cheese (dairy), whole-wheat crackers (grain), and an apple (fruit).
- Include a fruit or vegetable. It's hard for kids to eat enough of these unless you serve them at snack times in addition to meals.
- Aim for about 250 calories. That will satisfy the appetite without overindulging it.
- Watch the fat, salt, and sugar. Try to pick foods that are low in all of these most of the time. Or at least balance the occasional greasy, sugary stuff with fruit, water, and whole-grain items.
- Steer clear of foods with trans fat. These are very common in processed foods. Read the ingredients to avoid purchasing anything with partially hydrogenated oil.

How much snacking is OK? That depends on your child's overall diet. But a good rule is to provide snacks every 2 to 3 hours between meals. For new ideas on healthy snacks, check out www.mealsmatter.org.

Optional sidebar:

Try These Super Snack Ideas!

- Baby carrots and yogurt
- Cucumbers and low-fat cheese
- Applesauce and graham crackers

- Hard-boiled eggs and 100% juice
- Hummus and whole wheat pita
- Breakfast cereal and low-fat milk

E-mail message: Use this sample e-mail message to send *Planet Health* messages home to parents.

Subject: *Planet Health* Tips for Parents: Snacking Healthfully

Dear Parents:

This month our class will use the *Planet Health* curriculum to explore the concepts of (insert curriculum goals here), using healthy snacking as a case study. Here are the key messages:

- Snacks should look like a minimeal with healthy foods from the main food groups.
- Foods that are high in fat, sugar, or salt with few nutrients should be saved for occasional snacks.
- Beware of what you hear or see on TV. Most snacks advertised are high in fat and sugar and low in nutrition.

We'll talk about what makes a healthy snack for everyday eating and which foods should be eaten only occasionally. Our goal is to help students make healthy choices most of the time. To boost the nutrition in your children's snacks, follow these *Planet Health* tips for parents:

- Growing kids need energy between meals in the form of a snack. Snacks can provide about 25% of your child's nutrition, so it's important to choose wisely.
- Think of snacks as "minimeals." In each snack, try to include foods from at least 2 of the 5 food groups—fruits, vegetables, grains, milk, and protein (eggs, meats, nuts, beans)—and that are low in saturated fat, cholesterol, and added sugar.
- You can and should place limits on low-nutrition foods such as candy, cookies, and chips. Serve those items only as occasional treats. Remember, it's easier to say no if you don't keep those foods in the house.

Looking for new snack ideas? Visit www.mealsmatter.org.