



by Karen Stephens

Nutrient-filled Snacks Fuel Kids' Healthy Development

You don't need a researcher to tell you that children run circles around most adults. Tasty, nutritious snacks help kids maintain their energy as they go about their business of learning through play. When daily schedules are tight, it's tempting to offer kids frequent snacks of sugar and fat-filled cookies, cakes, or doughnuts. Such snacks offer calories, but they lack the variety of vitamins and minerals kids need to build healthy cell tissue and strong bones.

In-between their three meals a day, children need a small snack about every two hours. The portion size for each snack item should be about 1/2 cup or 1/2 ounce for kids up to age 5, increasing to about one cup or one ounce for kids age 6-12. A typical snack should include at least two of the following components: cracker/bread/grain, fruit juice or milk, vegetable, fruit, dairy product or meat/meat substitute.

Offer fresh (and washed!) produce often, as well as whole-grain crackers or breads, fruit canned in its own juice, and 100% fruit juices. Very young children need whole milk, but for children age 2 and older, many doctors believe low fat milk is acceptable and heart-wise.

To encourage good nutrition and eating habits, don't let snack-time become stale. Offer variety and homemade snacks whenever you can. For instance, bread snacks may include bagels, tortillas, pitas, English muffins. There is a wide variety of crackers to offer. Fruit choices can be simple as grapes or as exotic as papaya. The same goes for vegetables. Whatever you serve, make sure it's bite-sized so it doesn't cause choking.

Below are kid-tested, nutrient-rich snacks for young taste buds. They'll fuel your child's fastest and most vulnerable time of development. And they'll taste mighty good to you, too.

Whenever possible, let kids lend a helping hand preparing snacks. They'll be much more tempted to take a taste. Don't forget to teach them to wash hands before they lend a hand.

Cheese & Flour Tortilla Wrap: Place a paper towel on a microwave-safe plate. On top of paper towel, place a soft-shell flour tortilla. Sprinkle tortilla with thin layer of grated cheese, such as mild cheddar, mozzarella, or provolone. Cover with another paper towel and microwave on high for about 30 seconds or until cheese melts. Remove from microwave, fold cheese-filled tortilla burrito fashion and serve.

Soft Home-baked Pretzels: From the freezer section, select a preferred brand of uncooked pretzel dough. Bake following directions on the box and serve warm.

Crackers with Tuna, Chicken, or Ham Salad: Offer whole-grain crackers spread with a thin layer of preferred fish or meat salad. For children *older than* age 2, crisp taco chips can be used to dip into individual servings of the spread. (Prevent "taco tears" by reminding kids to chew taco chips well before swallowing.)

Peanut Butter Honey Balls: Combine 1 cup dry milk, 1 cup peanut butter, 1/2 cup honey, 1/2 tsp. vanilla, 2/3 cup chopped peanuts, 1 cup wheat germ, 1 cup crushed graham crackers, 1 cup raisins. Mix all together, form into 1-inch balls. Refrigerate leftovers.

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Pumpkin Muffins: 1/2 cup flour, 1/2 cup sugar, 2 tsp. baking powder, 1/2 tsp salt, 1/2 t cinnamon, 1/2 tsp. nutmeg, 1/2 cup milk, 1/2 cup canned pumpkin, 1/4 cup butter or margarine, melted, 1 egg, 1/2 c. raisins. Mix all ingredients in a bowl just until flour is moistened. Batter should be lumpy. Grease muffin cups or use paper cupcake liners. Fill muffin cups 2/3 full. Bake 18-20 minutes at 400 degrees. Immediately remove from pan.

Ants on a Log: Cut celery into 4-inch logs. Fill celery cavity with peanut butter or cream cheese. Put raisins on top and serve.

Picnic Peanut Butter No-Bake Bars: 1/3 cup margarine, 1/3 cup peanut butter, 1/4 cup honey, 2 tablespoons sugar, 3 cups 100% natural cereal crushed. Combine all ingredients except cereal in 1-quart saucepan; bring to boil. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly about two minutes. Pour over cereal; mix well. Press into greased 8" square baking pan. Chill until firm then cut into bars. Store in refrigerator.

Ape Shake: 5 cups milk, 2-1/2 cups plain yogurt, 5 bananas. Pour into blend and mix thoroughly. Chill then serve.

Banana Apple Shake: 1/2 cup yogurt, 1/2 cup apple juice, and 1 medium banana, peeled. Combine all 3 ingredients in blender for about 1 minute. Serve chilled.

Apple Shake: 1 cup chilled applesauce, 3/4 cup milk, very cold, 1/4 tsp. vanilla, 1/8 tsp. cinnamon. Combine in blender for about 1 minute. Chill and serve.

Yogurt Smoothie: 1/2 cup yogurt, 1/2 banana, 1/4 cup chilled fresh or canned fruit, dash cinnamon. Combine in blender until smooth, about 1 minute, and then serve.

Sunny Sipper: Blend: 1/4 cup honey, 1/2 cup orange juice, 2 tablespoons lemon juice. Then add: 1 can (6 oz.) evaporated milk, 1 can (12 oz.) apricot nectar. Combine in blender until frothy. Chill and serve.

Blender Tootie-Frootie: 4 cups chopped fruit (peaches, pears, or berries), 2-1/2 cup fruit juice (grape, apple, or orange), 1 tsp. cinnamon. Blend two cups of the fruit with juice and spice. Then add the last 2 cups of fruit and blend again. Chill and serve.

Purple Cow Shake: 2/3 cup cold grape juice, 1/2 cup vanilla ice cream, one 8 oz. Container plain yogurt. Combine all ingredients in blend till smooth. Serve immediately.

Trail Mix: In a large container that will close airtight, mix 2 cups of each of the following together and serve: variety of cereals (made of oat, rice, wheat, etc.) peanuts, dried apricots, raisins, coconut, sunflower seeds, or other family favorites.

Chex Party Mix: 1/2 cup margarine, 1/2 tsp. salt, 4-1/2 Worcestershire sauce, 2 cups Rice Chex, 2 cups Corn Chex, 2 cups Bran Chex, 2 cups Wheat Chex, 1 cup mixed nuts. Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Combine dry ingredients in a large bowl. In a 15" x 10" x 2" inch baking pan, melt margarine. Remove and pour mixed dry ingredients evenly throughout the pan. Bake 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes. Spread on absorbent paper to cool.

Banana Boats: Slice bananas lengthwise and roll in yogurt then sprinkle with wheat germ or crushed graham crackers.

Banana Pops: Peel a banana. Cut in half across the middle. Push wooden popsicle stick into center of each banana half and freeze. Eat.

Banana Pop Surprise: Peel banana and cut in half across the middle. Spread peanut butter on the half and then stick banana onto popsicle stick. Roll the peanut butter covered banana in crushed graham crackers or wheat germ.

Fruit Kabob: On a toothpick, skewer bite-size fresh fruits such as kiwi, strawberry, grape, pineapple, banana, or other local fruits. (To avoid dangers involving the toothpick, offer fruits in this manner only when children are *over* age 2.)

About the Author — Karen Stephens is director of Illinois State University Child Care Center and instructor in child development for the ISU Family and Consumer Sciences Department. For nine years she wrote a weekly parenting column in her local newspaper. Karen has authored early care and education books and is a frequent contributor to *Exchange*.

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