

Healthy snacks for kids

Here are some appetizing alternatives to chips, cookies and other unhealthy snacks.

By Stephanie Rogers

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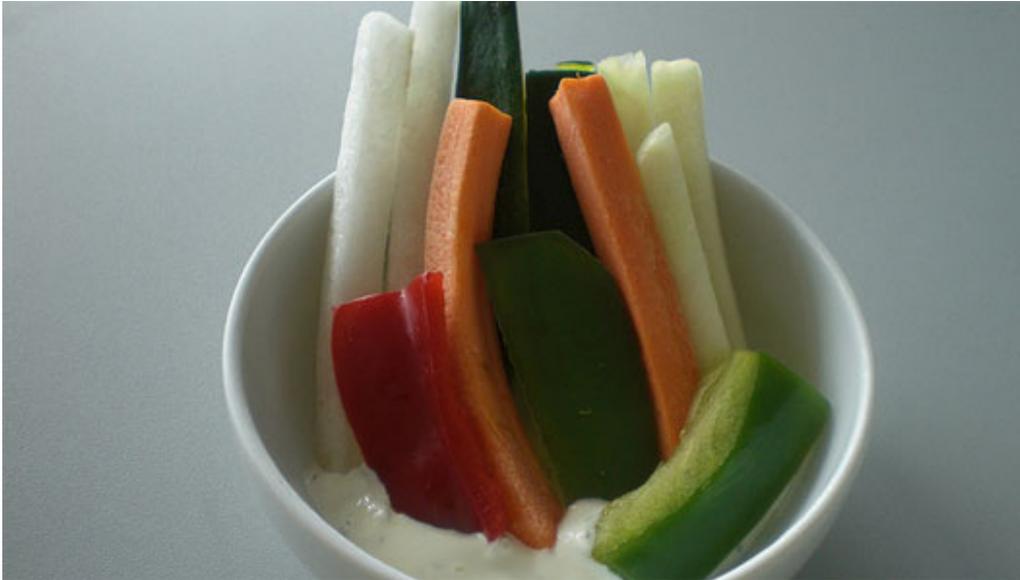


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Healthy snacks for kids don't have to be boring and bland. You can make them an appetizing alternative to chips, cookies and other unhealthy snacks that are full of empty calories rather than the nutrients kids need to grow and thrive. Clear the junk from your cupboard and curb kids' hunger between meals with cheese, yogurt, pretzels and other snacks that provide lasting energy. These tips and ideas will help you encourage healthy eating any time of day.

Tips for healthy snacking

Veggies, fruits, whole grains and lean meat and dairy products should make up the bulk of your child's snacks. In addition to the vitamins and minerals provided by a colorful array of fruits and vegetables, children from toddlers to teens need carbohydrates, protein and healthy fats.

Choose whole foods that are as close to their natural state as possible; even so-called "healthy" or "natural" pre-packaged snacks are often full of preservatives and other ingredients that aren't exactly ideal.

Mix it up. Offer lots of variety, frequently introducing new foods — you never know what will turn into a favorite. With many healthy options to choose from, kids won't miss unhealthy snacks as much. Cookie cutters in fun shapes can also help

make foods like fruit and cheese more enticing for little ones.

One of the most important ways to help your children choose healthier snacks is to eat them yourself. Set a good example with wholesome snack choices and your kids will follow suit.

Healthy snack ideas for kids

- Cheese is an ideal healthy snack for kids since it contains the protein and fat needed to maintain energy throughout the day. Pair it with fruit on kabobs, with apple slices or with whole-grain pretzel sticks.
- Yogurt satisfies sweet cravings and can be made extra-fun by freezing it into popsicles, topping it with nuts and berries or tossing it in the blender with fruit and ice to make a delicious smoothie.
- Carrots can be thinly sliced into "chips" and served with plain yogurt, hummus or peanut butter. Other kid-friendly dipping veggies include celery, cucumber, cherry tomatoes and cauliflower.
- Nuts are another filling, high-energy snack that kids love. Spread peanut or almond butter onto whole grain tortillas and roll them up into pinwheel shapes, or just serve them alongside fruit, vegetables, pretzels or crackers.
- Bananas can be dipped in yogurt and crunchy cereal and then frozen for a treat that rivals ice cream.
- Salsa can be made the traditional way with tomatoes, or with fruit like pineapple and strawberries. Serve it with baked wheat pita chips, whole grain tortilla chips or veggie sticks.
- Whole wheat mini-bagels are sized just right for kids and can be topped with cream cheese, peanut butter, hummus or even tomato sauce and mozzarella for tiny pizzas.
- Turkey, ham and other thinly sliced meats make great mini-sandwiches on crackers with cheese. Try rolling a slice in a tortilla with mustard and sliced pickles.
- Whole-grain pita pockets can be filled with all kinds of fun and healthy ingredients like cottage cheese and fruit or peanut butter and bananas.
- Air-popped popcorn is far healthier than the microwave variety. Toss it with grated parmesan cheese for a salty, crunchy snack. Yogurt-covered raisins and dried cherries add a pop of sweet flavor.
- Oat muffins spread with yogurt frosting are just as tasty as cupcakes, even when they're made with ingredients like honey, yogurt and applesauce instead of sugar and oil. You can even sneak veggies like zucchini into muffins and most children will be none the wiser.
- Baked sweet potato fries are an easy way to get kids to eat their veggies, offering the crispness of regular French fries without the fat.