

## Just Try it

# You Don't Have to Say No Top 10 Healthy Snacks

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**S**tudies show the number of calories children consume in snacks has doubled since the 1970s. It is currently estimated that one-quarter to one-third of kids' daily calories now come from snacks. The biggest problem is not the snacking itself, but what kids and teens are snacking on – processed, easy-to-grab chips, snack bars, crackers, cookies and candy.

When offered healthy choices at the right times, snacks help manage hunger, while boosting nutrition, focus and energy. Offering snacks at predictable times, and not too close to meals, helps prevent grazing and allows kids to decide what and how much to eat based on hunger.

The type and amount of snacks to offer a child will vary depending on age, with smaller children needing smaller portions more frequently and teens making more decisions on their own. Parents can encourage healthy snacking for all ages by having plenty of nutritious foods available at home. The following snack ideas make the top 10 list because they are packed with nutrients, easy to prepare and taste good. Each snack provides at least two food groups to help reach the recommended servings of fruit, vegetables and dairy that are lacking when kids eat processed, packaged snacks.

### ➤ **Fruit & Cheese:**

A great combination of healthy carbohydrate and protein to boost energy levels. Cheese is a good source of calcium, and string cheese in particular is a popular choice with kids. Fruit adds much needed fiber and a variety of vitamins, along with being naturally sweet, which appeals to kids' taste buds.

### ➤ **Peanut Butter-Apple Wrap:**

Assuming allergies are not a concern, nut butters are a good source of healthy fat, protein and fiber. Choosing a whole-wheat tortilla provides B vitamins and fiber, while chopped apples provides a vitamin C boost. This is a great on-the-go snack, too.

### ➤ **Bean Dip & Vegetables:**

Hummus, black bean dip or low-fat refried beans mixed with salsa served with vegetables or whole grain crackers are hearty enough to keep kids full until dinner. They are rich in protein, iron, magnesium, potassium and fiber.

### ➤ **Egg Pita Sandwich:**

Scrambled eggs served in a whole wheat pita are rich in protein and fiber, a good option for kids who missed protein at a previous meal or have a long stretch between school and the dinner meal. Cooking spinach or other vegetables with the eggs and topping with salsa is a great way to add a serving of vegetables and valuable nutrients. Hard-boiled eggs make a great on-the-go snack and can be kept in the refrigerator up to seven days.

➤ **Popcorn & Watermelon:**

Popcorn can be a very healthy snack, as long as it's not drenched in butter and salt. It has all the benefits of a whole grain and can be mixed into homemade trail mix for variety. Watermelon is the ultimate summer fruit. It is a good source of vitamins A and C, potassium and lycopene, and can be purchased locally this time of year, helping to reduce the carbon footprint.

➤ **Whole Grain Cereal & Milk:**

When chosen carefully, this tried-and-true snack provides lots of vitamins, much-needed calcium, vitamin D and fiber. To avoid a sugar load, purchase cereal with no more than six grams of sugar and at least two or three grams of fiber per serving, such as Kix, Cheerios (plain and multigrain), Life, Wheat Chex and Puffins. Check the ingredient list to make sure the first ingredient is a whole grain, such as whole wheat flour, whole grain blend, rolled oats or whole oat flour.

➤ **Mini Pizza:**

An easy snack for kids to make. Spread your favorite pasta sauce on a whole wheat English muffin, top with shredded mozzarella cheese and place in the toaster oven. This is a great way to provide a whole grain serving, along with fiber, B vitamins and calcium. Be adventurous and add chopped olives, bell pepper or mushrooms for variety.

➤ **Homemade Smoothie:**

One of the easiest ways to sneak in extra fruit servings. Blend with milk and regular or Greek yogurt. Even picky eaters love this naturally sweet treat that is chock full of protein, vitamins and minerals.

➤ **DIY Trail Mix:**

Combine low-sugar cereal with dried fruit and nuts to pack a nutrient punch. A great snack at home or prepared ahead of time to take out. Nuts have many minerals including magnesium, iron and zinc, combined with fiber and vitamins from the dried fruit and cereal.

➤ **Yogurt Parfait:**

Unsweetened Greek yogurt is the ideal choice because it has double the protein of regular yogurt. Instead of the usual berries, try adding banana slices, along with nuts or dry cereal for a nutrient-rich snack. If plain yogurt is too tart for your kids, add a teaspoon of honey or sugar, which will be far less sugar than the flavored yogurts that contain three or four teaspoons of added sugar.

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