



QUESTION AND ANSWERS

MAKE IT A FRESH SNACK

Why are we concerned about children and snacking?

A major contributor to the increase in obesity prevalence is the imbalance between energy intake and energy expenditure. The main cause of increased energy intake is the significant rise in consumption of unhealthy, generally highly processed¹ and 'non-core' foods². (When talking to children or the community most nutritionists call these foods "sometimes" foods or "extra foods", but in professional spheres they can also be referred to as 'energy-dense nutrient poor foods and beverages' (EDNP), non-core foods or 'empty kilojoules').

The other issue associated with consuming too much 'junk' food and drinks is that they displace healthier foods from the diet. This can compromise children's overall nutritional intake at a time in their lives of rapid growth and development when a good diet is essential. Setting good habits early, in respect to snacks, can contribute to better health of children and reduce the role of preventable diet-related diseases like high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol, diabetes and osteoporosis.

How much 'junk food' do kids eat?

For children aged 2-16 years, far too much – nearly 40% of the kilojoules they consume – come from 'non-core' foods and drinks – and they eat 4.5 (4-8 year olds) to 6.5 (14-16 year olds) serves per day of junk food³. The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating recommends only choosing 'non-core' foods sometimes and only in small amounts.

So do kids need snacks at all?

Snacks do not have to consist of 'non-core' or 'junk foods'. If chosen well healthy snacks can provide the opportunity for children to obtain the energy and nutrients they require for healthy growth and development and meet the daily servings recommended by The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating (AGHE).

Sometimes it is hard to get kids to eat and so some parents may be relieved that at least their kids are eating 'something', even if it is not healthy. Snacks can be important to help children consume enough core foods from each food group, but it serves no purpose if it consists of non-core foods. If children are not hungry or don't want to eat the food offered as a snack then it is OK to skip a snack and wait until the next meal.

¹ Examples of 'minimally processed' foods are pasteurised milk, tinned fruit or frozen vegetables. Examples of highly processed foods are confectionery, soft drinks and potato crisps.

² As defined by The Australian Guide to healthy eating as foods which do not fit into the five 'core' food groups and are not essential in providing the body with the nutrients it requires

³ SA Health (2007) 2007 National Australian Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey: South Australian Findings





How do I know what is a healthy snack – the supermarkets are full of products that claim to be a ‘healthy snack’?

An easy way to pick a healthy snack is to think ‘fresh’ for example fresh fruit and vegies, fresh reduced-fat dairy, wholegrain breads and cereals, along with proteins such as eggs, lean meats, chicken and fish.

Yes, but fruit and vegies are expensive.

Fruit and vegies – whether fresh, frozen or canned are generally better value for money than heavily processed foods as they are higher in fibre and lower in fat, sugar and salt. So they fill you up and keep you going for longer. Fruit and vegies in season are generally cheaper per kilogram than processed snack foods. We have compiled some cost comparisons that can be used as examples on the OPAL website, visit www.opal.sa.gov.au

My kids don’t eat snacks, should I start giving them ‘healthy snacks’.

It is not necessary for kids to have snacks, although most kids do eat between meals. If your children don’t – then don’t stress just ensure that mealtimes provide them with all the nutrients they require by sticking to the core food groups such as fruit and vegies, wholegrain breads and cereals, reduced-fat dairy, proteins such as lean meats, fish, chicken, eggs and beans.

My kids won’t eat anything that is ‘healthy’.

Kids’ food choice is influenced by many things such as peer choice and advertising but it is also influenced by parents and what parents provide. Start small with just one or two changes a week. Remember it can take up to 10 tries before a child will like a food so keep persisting and you will be surprised how tastes change. Kids are influenced by parental behaviour, so if they see you enjoying fresh snack choices they will be more inclined to try it. Involving children in the shopping, preparation and even growing for foods can be a great way to influence their food choices.

Don’t kids deserve a treat every now and then?

Absolutely, we all enjoy a treat now and then, the problem is kids are being given (or are seeking) these types of foods too regularly. This is contributing to a range of health problems. Some great alternatives to try include:

- > frozen yoghurts
- > air-popped popcorn with a sprinkle of cinnamon or mixed with some dried fruit
- > fruit smoothies
- > crunchy vegie sticks with dip

Save the ‘treats’ for celebrations and don’t stock them as everyday foods in the pantry. The AGHE recommends choosing ‘extra’ foods only sometimes and in small amounts.





I don't have time to shop and then prepare 'healthy' snacks

We are all busy these days but 'fresh' snacks can be quick and easy to prepare. Try:

- > fresh piece of fruit or a small container of tinned fruit in the lunch box – takes no time
- > wholegrain or rice crackers and reduced-fat sliced cheese
- > cut up veggie sticks and keep them in the fridge so they are ready to go
- > baked beans on toast – a quick filling snack for hungry teenagers that they can prepare themselves

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