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EXTENSION

# Family Matters

*Improving Health Together*

## September 2025 Newsletter

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### Smart Snacking

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Snacks are an important part of a young child's nutrient needs. Parents play a powerful role in shaping their children's behaviors towards eating and food in general. Therefore, encouraging and guiding smart snacking can have a lasting impact on a child's overall development.

It is hard for young children to get all the nutrients and calories they need in three meals a day. Smart snacks bridge the gap for nutritional needs beyond mealtimes. Therefore, consider having a balanced snack that contributes to the child's nourishment to sustain energy and curb their hunger until the next meal.

It is recommended that young children eat three meals a day as part of their daily routine. This can be complemented by thoughtfully timed snacks between meals. Optimal snacking involves serving a snack two hours after a meal or 2 - 3 snacks per day. This allows children to maintain their appetites for mealtime while avoiding having a very hungry child right at mealtime.

Smart snacks also maintain and support overall nutritional balance throughout the day. It is a good idea to plan and portion out snacks in advance that will provide the biggest nutritional value. Being pro-active will help you provide nutrient rich options made with minimally processed ingredients thus reducing intake of processed foods such as chips, cookies, and sugary snacks.

Minimizing distractions and choosing a designated place to eat is important. It is also recommended to avoid watching TV or using electronic devices while eating snacks. Encourage young children to sit at a table to eat instead of snacking on the go. Be aware that eating while moving around is a choking hazard. Be sure children are properly supervised while eating.

Remember to serve appropriate portions. Snacks are meant to be smaller than meals. Choosing a variety of foods from all the food groups will provide young children with the energy they need between meals without overeating.

*Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods ...*

## Let's Talk

Eating is something we do several times a day and it uses all five of our senses. We use our senses to determine how food might taste. Therefore, talking through the sensory experience will help support your child in creating a comfortable exposure to exploring food.

- **Smell:** Encourage children to notice how their snack smells.
- **Sight:** Describe the colors and shapes of the food. A colorful snack encourages children to eat more variety.
- **Sound:** Listen to the crunch of crackers or the pop of popcorn. What is the sound as they are biting or chewing the food? Is it easy to eat or harder to chew?
- **Taste:** Encourage children to savor each bite, chewing slowly and paying attention to the flavors and textures.
- **Touch:** Let them feel the food, noticing its temperature and consistency. Allowing children to play with food helps them learn about the different textures.

Young children may need to see and explore a food 20 times before they are willing to try it. Always offer a small portion of a new food. Then, include familiar foods so that children will have something to fall back on if they don't prefer a certain food.

## Recipe for Healthy Fun

### Smart, tasty snack suggestions:

- **Yogurt Parfait:** Layer low-fat yogurt, choose plain or those with less sugar, with fruit and dried cereal for a healthy parfait
- **Cheese slices** with thin apple wedges
- **Hard cooked egg boats:** Cut a hard-boiled egg in half and pop in a pretzel stick with a triangle shaped piece of cheese on top for the mast
- **Logs:** place a piece of cheese on a thin slice of meat and roll into a log shape
- **Ants on a Log:** Fill a celery stick with peanut butter and top with raisins
- **Fancy Sandwiches:** Cut 100% whole wheat bread into shapes with a cookie cutter. Top with a favorite topping.

