

TOTALLY  
**HEALTHY,**  
SUPER  
**TASTY**



written by  
**HOLLY PEVZNER**  
photography  
**ROMULO YANES**  
food styling  
**VICTORIA GRANOF**



You don't have  
to banish chips!  
See our healthy  
(and delish) recipe  
on page 174.



Every day at 3:00  
I stand outside my  
6-year-old's school  
waiting for him  
to bounce out of  
the building and  
ask the inevitable:  
**"CAN I HAVE A  
SNACK?"**

His eyes dart from the nearby ice cream truck to the street cart selling churros (yes, churros) to the cotton candy stand on the corner. Given those options, it's no wonder snacking has become a negative word for this generation. High-sugar, empty-carb, mindless munchies only add to the childhood obesity rates that have more than doubled in the last 30 years.

But that doesn't mean you need to banish between-meal noshes. In fact, "snacks get a bad rap, but growing kids need to refuel every four hours or so to keep their energy stores up," says Jessica Crandall, R.D., a national spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. The problem isn't snacking: It's *what* kids are snacking on.



“Fruits or vegetables are good, but only a small number of kids snack on healthy food,” says Barry Popkin, Ph.D., professor of nutrition at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In fact, his recent study found that kids consume 600 calories a day from snacks, which is more than another meal.

And schools aren’t helping. My son’s cafeteria, for one, offers an ice cream station twice a week. Others have vending machines stocked with junk, which are (for now) exempt from federal nutrition standards. Just how big a difference would

healthier options make? A study in *Pediatrics* found that when schools restrict vending machine choices, the average Body Mass Index of students decreases significantly—not because kids stopped snacking, but because they chose healthier options.

Supporting this idea, researchers found that kids who eat frequently are 22 percent less likely to be overweight than peers who stick to three squares. The all-day nosers snacked on healthy foods, filling them up for substantially fewer calories than a large meal.

While this is potentially good news for moms who

want to appease hungry monsters at the end of the day, it also raises more questions. I usually counter my son’s pleas for ice cream with pretzels and dried apricots. I think they’re healthy, but are they really? What constitutes a nutritionally sound snack, anyway? In search of ideas, I asked Crandall; Rachel Meltzer Warren, R.D.; and Maryann Jacobsen, R.D., co-author of *Fearless Feeding: How to Raise Healthy Eaters from High Chair to High School*—all fellow moms—to develop a go-to snacking guide\* you can rely on.

## TIME TO EAT?

How to tell if they really need a nosh

### HUNGER

“Look for irritability and low energy levels. And ask if your child’s stomach is growling,” says Crandall. Also, do the math. Most kids need to eat every four hours.

## ANATOMY OF A HEALTHY SNACK

Follow these four tips for creating the ultimate answer to “Moom, I’m hungry!”

1

### KEEP IT SIMPLE

“You don’t need to hit every vitamin and mineral in order for a snack to be healthy,” says Meltzer Warren. It’s about the big picture, not micromanaging calories or specific ingredients, agrees Jacobsen. “As a general rule, I recommend shooting for a snack that includes two to three food groups: protein, dairy, fruit, veggies, whole grains, or healthy fats,” she says.

2

### GO FOR COMBOS

Kids eat up to 72 percent fewer calories when given a cheese-and-veggie snack versus a pile of potato chips, according to a study in *Pediatrics*. “The cheese and vegetables together are more satisfying,” says study co-author Mitsuru Shimizu, Ph.D. “Also, a combo of foods is less boring than a handful of chips, so kids will eat less over the same amount of time.”

3

### ADD A COOL FACTOR

When offering a snack, ask your child what his favorite superhero would eat. When 6- to 12-year-olds were asked to imagine the snack choice of Batman or Spider-man, then asked to make their own snack choice, 45 percent chose apple slices over French fries, lowering their calorie intake by 193 calories. (Brussels sprouts and broccoli are hereby dubbed Hulk smashers!)

4

### SERVE IT UP ON KID-SIZE PLATES

It’s no great surprise, but when first-graders used smaller dishware, they served themselves smaller portions, according to a recent study in the journal *Pediatrics*. When kids used adult-size dishes, they took an average of 90 additional food calories. (Watching your own waistline? Go ahead and follow your child’s lead and eat off her dishware instead!)

### HABIT

If she seems generally distracted or antsy, offer water first. Sometimes having a drink serves up enough activity for a restless child. To make H<sub>2</sub>O more appealing, add lemon or orange slices or drop in ice cubes containing real fruit. Fruity herbal tea is great, too.

\*Serving sizes throughout story are for 6- to 12-year-olds.





*Slow down there!  
Even healthy  
chips, like these,  
should be served  
in individual  
portions!*



## easy eats



### DO THE DIP!

Nothing satisfies like a crunchy-smooth combo of dipping sticks and saucy spreads. To keep calories low and nutrients high, pair 1 cup of fruits and veggies with a dip. Just be sure to stick with the recommended serving size (shown at left)!

#### DIP SPARINGLY

Almond butter  
Peanut butter

#### DIP MODERATELY

Guacamole  
Tzatziki  
Black bean dip  
Hummus

#### DIP FREELY

(almost!)  
Salsa

### GRAB 'N' GO

In the real world, sometimes pre-packaged snacks have to suffice. Don't sweat it: These options are all healthy picks, says Meltzer Warren.

**YOGURT TUBES** Of the squeeze yogurts out there, Chobani Champions has the least added sugar and no artificial coloring.

**STRING CHEESE** It's a good source of protein, which keeps kids feeling fuller longer. Meltzer Warren's pick: Horizon Organic Mozzarella String Cheese. "I try to use organic dairy as much as possible to limit kids' exposure to synthetic hormones and antibiotics," she says.

**APPLESAUCE** "I like Earth's Best Kids because it has no added sweetener," says Meltzer Warren.

**FRUIT CUPS** Look for Dole Fruit Cups that are packaged in 100 percent juice.

**GRANOLA BARS** "Some come dangerously close to candy bar territory," says Meltzer Warren. Her fave? Annie's Organic: "They each have 8 grams of whole grains and are relatively low on the sugar scale."

### CHIP IN!

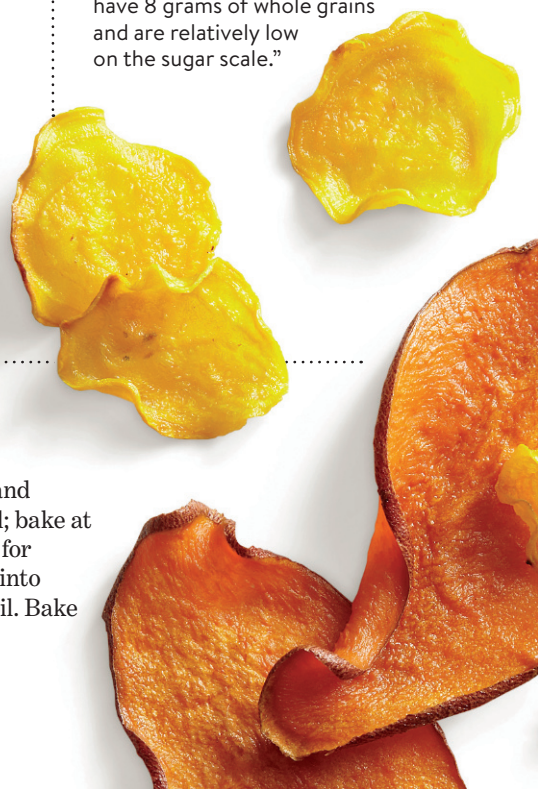
Keep the crunch but lose the grease with these healthy options.

#### GET FRUITY

Slice apples or pears very thinly. Lay slices in a single layer on parchment paper and bake at 200°F for two hours, flipping once.

#### VEG OUT

For beets, sweet potatoes, carrots, and parsnips, slice and toss with olive oil; bake at 350°F for 20 minutes. Flip and bake for another 20. Kale chips? Tear leaves into bite-size pieces and toss with olive oil. Bake for 20 minutes total, flipping once.



## GET CHEESY!

Pair protein with quality carbs for a filling fruit-and-cheese combo that's sure to please your kid's palate. Serve up 1.5 ounces of cheese (about three small cubes or 1½ slices) or ½ cup cottage cheese with about a cup of fruit slices. Match...

- **Cheddar** with apples, pears, grapes, stone fruit
- **Feta** with apples, pears
- **Gouda** with apples, pears, grapes, stone fruit
- **Swiss** with apples, pears
- **Cottage cheese** with stone fruit, berries, melon
- **Mozzarella** with melon, berries
- **Provolone** with melon
- **Havarti** with grapes
- **Monterey Jack** with stone fruit, berries
- **Muenster** with berries



## MIX IT UP!

"Trail mix is a healthy, protein-rich favorite in my house," says Jacobsen. "Your kids can build their own by choosing their favorite ingredients—just keep the proportions in check." To make a big batch that you can store in a jar or plastic baggie, use this easy formula:

### HERE'S THE SCOOP

Save those little plastic cups that applesauce and diced fruit come in. They're about ½ cup—the perfect size for a single serving of trail mix.

**1/2**  
CUP

**SWEET TREAT**

**1**  
CUP

**NUTS/ SEEDS**

**1**  
CUP

**DRIED FRUIT**

**2**  
CUPS

**WHOLE GRAIN**



## SNACKS FOR DINNER?

Got a snack-aholic kid with an aversion to mealtime? No problem. "You can easily turn snacks into meals," says Meltzer Warren. "Think of it as kid tapas." Just aim to divide your kid's plate into ½ produce, ¼ protein, ¼ grains.