

Help! I'm the Worst Snack Mom

by Jill Weisenberger, MS, CDE, RD

What should you do when your kids balk at the nutritious snacks you picked out for scouts, sports and other group activities? They complain none of the other moms send the yucky stuff, and they want you to send cookies, sodas and snack cakes too. Should you cave or remain firm in your decision to provide only wholesome food?



Give Kids What They Love

"Most kids get over a quarter of their daily calories from snacks. That's enough to qualify for a fourth meal," says Karen Ansel, MS, RD, spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Unfortunately, most of those snacks are desserts, sugary drinks and salty foods, she adds. Serving healthful alternatives gives your kids the nutritional boost their growing bodies need. Erin Macdonald, RD, nutrition, fitness and wellness coach in Orange County, California, suggests giving them what they love: strawberries, grapes, mini whole-wheat bagels with light cream cheese or almond butter and a selection of nuts (one caveat: for children under the age of 4, nuts may be a choking hazard unless they are finely chopped) and dried fruits. Fill individual muffin cups with pistachios and dried cranberries or put popcorn in colorful bags or paper cups. Sometimes the packaging is enough to excite kids, so tap into your creativity. Decorate muffin cups, bags and paper cups with your child's school or team colors. In scorching weather, help kids cool off with frozen grapes or frozen juice pops.

Kids Like Wraps

- Spread nut butter on a whole-wheat tortilla or flatbread and sprinkle sliced strawberries, bananas or peaches on one-third of the wrap before rolling and slicing.
- Try hummus and shredded carrots on rolled flatbread.
- Fill a small tortilla with a variety of diced and shredded vegetables and reduced-fat ranch dressing.

Kids Love to Dip

- Mix taco seasonings into low-fat plain yogurt and serve with veggie sticks.
- Serve baked tortilla chips with a choice of salsa or bean dip.

Another approach, suggests Ansel, is to send a mix of the good-for-you and not so healthy snacks such as both fruit and cookies. "There's no reason kids can't have a little of each," she suggests. Or simply toss a sweet into something more nutritious. For example, before rolling a flatbread with peanut butter, sprinkle some mini chocolate chips on top. Add chocolate chips or raisins or broken cookies to your homemade trail mix of nuts, dried fruit and whole grain cereals. Or offer a homemade cookie with oats and dried apricots.

Don't forget to seek support from the other parents. Like you, they may want to send healthful snacks but feel pressure from their children. Slowly start a revolution, suggests Ansel. Start with one parent, then another and another. You may be surprised how many parents jump on board. If you're met with resistance, approach it as feeding your child athlete, says Macdonald. To do well in sports and other physical activities, "your child has to train hard which also means to eat like an athlete," she explains.

By offering nutritious snacks, you're providing the food and nutrients your children need for good health and well-being. Perhaps more importantly, you're also teaching them what a balanced diet looks like and how to eat well. Now that's something that lasts well beyond snack time!