

Healthy Snack Food Options for Students:

Fruits and Vegetables



Most of the snacks served to children should be fruits and vegetables, since most kids do not eat the recommended number of servings fruits and vegetables each day. Eating fruits and vegetables lowers the risk of heart disease, cancer, and high blood pressure. Fruits and vegetables also contain important nutrients like vitamins A and C and fiber.

Serving fresh fruits and vegetables can seem challenging. However, good planning and the growing number of shelf-stable fruits and vegetable products on the market make it easier. Though some think fruits and vegetables are costly snacks, they are actually less costly than many other less-healthy snacks on a per-serving basis.

Try lots of different fruits and vegetables and prepare them in various ways to find out what your kids like best.

Fruits & Vegetables



- Apples (it can be helpful to use an apple corer)
- Apricots
- Bananas
- Blackberries
- Blueberries
- Cantaloupe
- Cherries
- Grapes (red, green, or purple)
- Honeydew Melon
- Kiwis (cut in half and give each child a spoon to eat it)
- Mango
- Nectarines
- Oranges
- Peaches

- Pears
- Pineapple
- Plums
- Strawberries
- Tangerines
- Watermelon

Applesauce (Unsweetened), Fruit Cups, and Canned Fruit. These have a long shelf life and are low-cost, easy, and healthy if canned in juice or light syrup.

Dried Fruit. Try raisins, apricots, apples, cranberries, pineapple, papaya, and others with little or no added sugars.

Frozen Fruit. Try freezing grapes or buy frozen blueberries, strawberries, peaches, and mangoes.

Fruit Leathers. Some brands of fruit snacks are more like candy than fruit, and should be avoided due to their high content of added sugars and lack of fruit.

Smoothies. Blend fruit with juice, yogurt or milk, and ice. Many store-made smoothies have added sugars and are not healthy choices.

Vegetables

Vegetables can be served raw with hummus, dip or salad dressing:

- Broccoli
- Carrot sticks or Baby Carrots
- Cauliflower
- Celery Sticks
- Cucumber
- Peppers (green, red, or yellow)
- Snap Peas
- Snow Peas
- String Beans
- Tomato slices or grape or cherry tomatoes
- Yellow Summer Squash slices
- Zucchini slices
- **Dips.** Try low-fat salad dressings, like fat-free Ranch or Thousand Island.

Healthy Grains (bread, crackers, cereals, etc.)



Though most kids eat plenty of grain products, too many of those grains are cookies, snack cakes, sugary cereals, and other refined grains that are high in sugars or saturated fat. Try to serve mostly whole grains, which provide more fiber, vitamins, and minerals than refined grains. In addition, try to limit added sugars to less than 35% by weight^{1,2} eliminate trans fats, and keep the saturated and trans fat low.

Note: Cookies, snack cakes, and chips should be saved for occasional treats, given their poor nutritional quality.

Whole Wheat English Muffins, Pita, or Tortillas. Stuff them with veggies or dip them in hummus or bean dip.

Breakfast Cereal. Either dry or with low-fat milk, *whole* grain cereals like Cheerios, Grape-Nuts, Raisin Bran, Mini Wheats, and Wheaties make good snacks. Look for cereals with no more than 6g of sugars per serving.

Crackers. Whole-grain crackers like Triscuits, which come in different flavors or thin crisps (or similar woven wheat crackers), Kalvi Rye crackers, or whole wheat Matzos can be served alone or with toppings, like low-fat cheese, peanut butter, or low-fat, reduced-sodium luncheon meat.

Rice Cakes. Look for rice cakes made from brown (whole grain) rice. They come in many flavors, and can be served with or without toppings.

Popcorn. Look for low-fat popcorn in a bag or microwave popcorn. Or you can air pop the popcorn and season it, *e.g.*, by spraying it with vegetable oil spray and adding parmesan cheese, garlic powder, or other non-salt spices.

Granola and Cereal Bars. Look for whole grain granola bars that are low in sugars and moderate in calories.

Low-Fat Dairy Foods

Dairy foods are a great source of calcium, which can help to build strong bones. However, dairy products also are the biggest sources of artery-clogging saturated fat in kids' diets. To protect children's bones and hearts, make sure all dairy foods served are low-fat or fat-free.

Yogurt. Look for brands that are low-fat or fat-free, moderate in sugars (no more than about 30 grams of sugars in a 6-oz. cup), and high in calcium (at least 25% of daily value [DV] for calcium in a 6-oz. cup).

Low-Fat Cheese. Cheese provides calcium, but usually its saturated fat price tag is too high. Cheese is the number two source of heart-damaging saturated fat in children's diets. Even with low-fat and reduced-fat cheese, be sure to serve with other foods like fruit, vegetables, or whole grain crackers.

Other Snack Ideas

Nuts. Nuts are a healthy choice, but since nuts are calorie dense, it is best to serve them along with another snack such as fruit. A small handful of nuts is a reasonable serving size. Examples include peanuts, pistachios, almonds, walnuts, cashews, or soy nuts.

WARNING: A small but growing number of kids have severe peanut and/or tree nut allergies. Before bringing in peanuts, peanut butter, or other nuts as a snack, check to make sure none of the children has an allergy.

Trail Mix. Trail mixes are easy to make and store well in a sealed container. Items to include: low-fat granola, whole grain cereals, peanuts, cashews, almonds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, and dried fruits like raisins, apricots, apples, pineapple, or cranberries.

Healthy Beverages

Water. Water should be the main drink served to kids at snack times. Water satisfies thirst and does not have sugar or calories.

Low-Fat and Fat-Free Milk. Milk provides key nutrients, such as calcium and vitamin D. Choose fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk to avoid the heart-damaging saturated fat found in whole and 2% (reduced-fat) milk. Healthy Eating Research recommends only unflavored milk, especially for children ages 2-4.

Fruit Juice. Avoid the added sugars of juice drinks, punches, fruit cocktail drinks, or lemonade.

Serving whole fruit is more nutritious than fruit juice. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children ages 1-6 years old drink no more than 6 ounces (one serving) of juice a day and children ages 7-18 years old drink no more than 12 ounces (two servings) of juice a day.

School Snacks for Kids (for the whole class or just your child):

- ***Banana muffins***
- ***Unsweetened applesauce cups***
- ***Natural fruit roll ups/fruit leather***
- ***Yogurt tubes and nut free granola***
- ***Whole wheat Goldfish crackers***
- ***Trail mix***
- ***Raisins***
- ***Mozzarella Cheese Sticks***
- ***Cheese and Crackers***