

CHAPTER FIVE



SNACKS &
SWEETS
taking
the fight out of kids'
favorite foods

snack foods are BIG BUSINESS in America...

Packaged snacks are currently worth about \$68 billion, and an estimated 3,000 new snack products are released every single year — most of them mere clever rearrangements of simple starches, salt, sugar, oil, and artificial flavorings.

Snacks are essential for kids. With their high metabolism and small bellies, children require a pick-me-up between meals. The American Academy of Pediatrics actually recommends that young children eat four to six times daily, and we've all seen the results of a toddler who has gone too long without refueling: The child collapses into a wailing, tear-stained puddle on the floor.

By the time they're school-age, children need snacks to stay alert in school and to have sufficient energy for after-school homework, sports, and other activities.

Yet most nutrition experts agree that kids' snacking habits undermine good health rather than contribute to it. There seem to be a few reasons for this:

- **Kids are snacking more than ever.** Between 1977 and 1996, kids' snacking increased 30 percent. Today, a full 25 percent of children's calories comes from between-meal foods.
- **Most snack foods are gross.** All that increased snacking might not be so bad if the quality of most snack foods wasn't so appalling. Today, the most popular snack foods among kids are soft drinks, cookies, chips, and candy.

■ **Snack foods that look healthful can be the opposite.** Even snacks that appear healthful are often not much better than candy; many of the leading granola bars on the market are higher in sugar than cookies. Don't even get us started about fruit snacks, which nutrition expert Marion Nestle has called "candy disguised as fruit."

With a little advance planning, though, snacks can boost children's health rather than detract from it. Here are a few tips for better snacking:

■ **Be prepared.** Packaged snacks are everywhere: in vending machines, at gas stations, in school hallways, and even in fitness centers. Every time your child sees them, they will serve as a reminder to "eat, eat, eat." Nearly half of all snack purchases are made on impulse. Be prepared with a healthful alternative.

■ **Consider snacks as you would a meal.** Since snacks are responsible for a full quarter of children's energy intake, it's a good idea to plan them much as you would a meal, with an eye on their overall nutrition.

■ **Location, location, location.** At home, keep snacking to a specific locale. Encourage kids to eat snacks at the table instead of mindlessly grazing on snacks while doing homework, watching television, or doing other activities.

■ **Consistency is key.** The more you can feed kids meals and snacks according to a predictable schedule, the less likely they are to harass you for unhealthy snacks throughout the day.

■ **Make the healthful stuff more convenient.** Keep healthful snacks — like vegetable slices with dip, fresh fruits, nuts, and cheese slices — someplace where kids can reach them. Keep less-healthful options out of sight.

dips & chips

OUTSIDE OF SUGARY TREATS, salty chips probably get top billing in the roster of irresistible junk foods. Scoop on a heap of creamy, cheesy dip, and you have the

mother lode of saturated fat in one bite-size morsel. Still, “chips” and dip can stay on the snack bar, and even offer some nutrition. Check out these healthful recipes.

FACT: A 2004 study showed that teens served a fast-food lunch ate an average of 1,652 calories in a single setting — more than 60 percent of their recommended daily energy intake.

Source: Ebbeling C. B., Sinclair K. B., Pereira M. A., et al. Compensation for Energy Intake From Fast Food Among Overweight and Lean Adolescents. *JAMA*. 2004; 291: 2828–2833.

Lima Bean Hummus



DIPS & CHIPS

We know, it's lima beans. But, really, it's good.

1. Bring the vegetable broth and frozen lima beans to a boil in a medium saucepan. Reduce the heat, cover, and simmer for 15 minutes, until the lima beans are soft.
2. Peel the garlic cloves. Put the bean mixture, garlic cloves, lemon juice, and salt and pepper to taste in a food processor. Pulse until it is a nice purée.
3. Add the olive oil with processor running until the hummus is the desired texture. Serve with pitas or any good bread.

- 1 cup low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1 (16-ounce) package frozen lima beans
- 2 garlic cloves
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- $\frac{1}{3}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Pita bread or other bread wedges

Makes about 2 cups

Hummus Toppings

For a spicy Asian flair, garnish the hummus with:

- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh mint
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil
- 1 teaspoon Asian hot sauce
- Zest from 1 lemon, chopped

For a more traditional Middle Eastern style, garnish the hummus with:

- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- Zest from 1 lemon, chopped

FACT: Between 1977 and 2006, the span of a single generation, the amount of snack calories consumed by children of all ages increased by an average of 168 calories per day to a total of 586 calories. Children aged 2 to 6 consumed an extra 181 calories per day during snack time.

Source: Piernas, Carmen and Popkin, Barry M. "Trends In Snacking Among U.S. Children," *Health Affairs*, 29, no. 3 (2010): 398–404.

White Bean–Pesto Dip



- 1 (15-ounce) can cannellini beans, rinsed and drained
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup Basil Pesto (page 145)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Fast and light, this dip goes great with sliced raw veggies or good, crusty bread.

Blend the beans, pesto, salt, and pepper to taste in a food processor until smooth.

Makes about 1 cup

Fresh Tomatillo Salsa

Kids love salsa and chips. We don't have to tell them salsa is just loads of chopped vegetables, do we? Here's a green salsa that is best made in late summer, when tangy tomatillos are at their peak. In other months, you can make it with canned tomatillos; the result will be more liquidy, but still tasty.

- 5 medium tomatillos
- 1 small yellow onion
- 1 green bell pepper
- 3 scallions
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 jalapeño pepper, or other small pepper with medium heat, seeds removed
- Juice of $\frac{1}{2}$ lime
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro

1. Chop the tomatillos, onion, bell pepper, and scallions into small pieces. Mince the garlic and hot pepper. Mix all the vegetables together in a large bowl, and then add the lime juice, salt, and olive oil. Stir.
2. Add the chopped cilantro just before serving. The salsa can be served right away, but its flavor improves slightly if it can sit for an hour.

Makes about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups

Pita “Chips”

Whole grain pita chips are a great way to get all the crunch of chips without the fat.

- 4 whole-wheat pita rounds
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon kosher salt

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Cut each pita round into eight triangles. Brush olive oil on the pita wedges and place on a baking sheet.
3. Sprinkle with the salt. Bake for about 7 minutes, or until crisp.

Serves 6