

Healthy School Snacks

Children need snacks to keep their busy bodies and minds going. Healthy snacking can help kids get important nutrients, make up for skipped meals and provide necessary fuel for learning, sports and other activities. Eating small, well-balanced snacks between meals can also keep kids from eating too much at mealtimes.¹ Many kids bring snacks to school, and sometimes school programs, school staff or other parents provide snacks for students to share. Making those snacks as nutritious as possible is important for student performance and the development of healthy eating habits.

ACTION FOR HEALTHY KIDS

TIP SHEET

Promoting Healthier Snacks at School

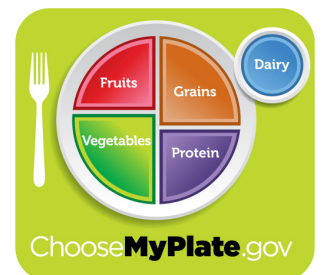
- Ask teachers and volunteers to make a point of eating healthy snacks in front of students and talk about how they feel better, stronger and smarter when eating this way.
- Seek community partners and funding opportunities to help your school provide healthy snacks.
- Make a classroom chart to track when kids bring in fresh fruits and veggies for a snack. Consider offering a non-food reward when students reach certain milestones.
- Conduct periodic taste tests of healthy snack items in the classroom or cafeteria. If children try something and like it, they're more likely to ask parents to have it at home.
- Ask if the school can put a big fruit bowl (instead of candy) in the front office, available for staff, students and parents to help themselves. Brainstorm ways to replenish the bowl with a variety of fruits.
- Hang colorful and fun posters that promote healthy snacks around the school.
- Promote fun nutrition messages:
 - Eat a Rainbow: Eat natural foods that come in a variety of colors.
 - Go, Slow, Whoa: Eat "go" foods almost anytime, "slow" foods less often and "whoa" foods only once in a while.
 - 5-2-1-0 each day: 5 or more fruits and veggies, 2 hours or less of recreational screen time, 1 hour or more of physical activity and 0 sugary drinks.
 - Rethink Your Drink: A campaign to teach students about the amount of sugar and calories in commonly consumed beverages, as well as their impact on health.

Making a Difference

As co-directors of the wellness committee at Cougar Run Elementary in Colorado, moms Annie Romano and Yvonne Faulkner decided to make promoting healthier snacks a priority, establishing P.A.C.K (Pack Assorted Colors for Kids) Week in the spring and timing it to lead-up to a school fun run. Each day, students were encouraged to bring a fruit or vegetable of a certain color for their snack (for example, Monday was "Pack Purple Day" and Wednesday was "Pack Red Day"). The wellness committee also urged students to wear the color of the day, which promoted the program, generated excitement and fostered school spirit. P.A.C.K Week was a huge success. The majority of students participated, and the wellness committee noticed that after the week was over, students chose more fresh fruits and vegetables at lunchtime. P.A.C.K Week now takes place at Cougar Run twice a year.

Put plenty of fruits and veggies on the snack menu

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) MyPlate icon urges us to fill half our plate with fruits and vegetables at every eating occasion. For most Americans, this means more than doubling the amount of fruits and vegetables we eat daily.²



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Healthy Snacking Recommendations

Snacks

- A significant portion of kids' daily calories come from snacks — and if they're eating processed, grain-based snack foods (like many of the popular, heavily-marketed options out there), many of those calories might be coming from added sugars. For healthy growth and development, make fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat/fat-free dairy products the primary choices.
- Portion control is very important — snacks should be served in appropriate portion sizes for a child's age, size and activity level.
- Read labels to choose snacks with less added sugar.

Beverages

- Encourage kids to drink water instead of sugary drinks throughout the day, including snack time. Soda, energy drinks and sports drinks are a major source of added sugar and calories, and most do not meet the USDA's Smart Snacks in School standards which cover all snacks that are sold in schools for immediate consumption during the school day.
- 1% low-fat/fat-free milk is a nutritious choice that helps kids get the nutrients they need.
- Juices (100%) also provide important nutrients, but choose smaller servings (half-cup) or dilute with water.

The American Heart Association recommends that children and teens consume less than 25 grams or 6 teaspoons of "added sugars" a day and drink no more than 8 ounces of sugary beverages a week.³

Resources

P.A.C.K Week: fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/pack-week

Eat a Rainbow: [fruitsandveggiesmorematters/eat-a-colorful-variety-of-fruits-and-vegetables](https://fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/eat-a-colorful-variety-of-fruits-and-vegetables)

Go, Slow, Whoa: <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/eat-right/choosing-foods.htm>

5-2-1-0: lets-go.org

Rethink Your Drink: [ActionforHealthyKids.org/game-on/find-challenges/cafeteria-challenges](https://actionforhealthykids.org/game-on/find-challenges/cafeteria-challenges)

USDA MyPlate: choosemyplate.gov

AFHK's healthy school snack food ideas: [ActionforHealthyKids.org/Tipsheet-Food-Ideas](https://actionforhealthykids.org/Tipsheet-Food-Ideas)

USDA Smart Snacks: fns.usda.gov/healthierschoolday/tools-schools-focusing-smart-snacks

Action for Healthy Kids® is a nationwide grassroots network mobilizing school professionals, families and communities to take actions that improve school foods, nutrition education, physical activity and physical education for all students. Through funding opportunities, expert technical assistance, and our flagship program, Game On, Action for Healthy Kids supports schools in becoming healthier places where children thrive.



1, 2, 3: See ActionforHealthyKids.org/References