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Should My Children Be Snacking All The Time?

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A weekly question/answer column

Should My Children Be Snacking All The Time?

Georgia Lauritzen answers:*

People often think that snacking is a “no-no” for children, and try to prevent them from eating between meals. This really isn't necessary or even helpful. Children’s energy needs are high, and they have a hard time getting enough food with just meals. The choice of snack foods is important and so is the timing. Here are some tips for healthy snacks:

- Plan regular snack times. Offer snacks midway between meals, 1 ½ to 2 hours before a regular meal. Stick to regular meal and snack times and don't let children snack all day long.
- Limit snacks to nutritious foods and use snack time to meet your child’s daily servings of the five good groups. For example, if your child hasn't had enough milk or bread, have a snack that includes these foods.
- Snacks should be varied and provide a nutritional contribution to the diet.
- Smart snacking foods include: fresh fruit (oranges, bananas, sliced apples); cheese and crackers; open-face sandwiches decorated with raisins or other foods; carrot curls; sandwiches cut with cookie cutters; string cheese, vanilla wafers or graham crackers; bagels.

* Georgia Lauritzen is Utah State University Extension Nutrition Specialist