Snacks & the Preschool Child: Why, What & How

Agenda

• Why?
  o Why is snacking important?

• What?
  o What foods should be offered at snack time?

• How?
  o How can we get preschoolers to eat healthy snacks?

Learning Objectives

• At the conclusion of this module, participants will be able to:
  o State two reasons why preschoolers need between meal snacks
  o Discuss how portion size affects total caloric intake
  o List three snack items that are nutrient dense and appropriate for most healthy preschool children
  o Explain why juice should be limited to one 6-ounce serving per day
  o Describe how the USDA MyPlate can help in the planning of snacks and meals
Why is snacking important?

• Rate of growth for preschool children
  - About 4 to 5 pounds per year
  - About 2 to 3 inches per year

• Little tummies
  - Difficult to consume all the calories needed to support health, growth and play in just three meals per day

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Goal</th>
<th>One</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschooler age</td>
<td>Less than 36</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36 to 47 months</td>
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<td></td>
<td>More than 47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical activity</td>
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<td>More than 79</td>
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<td>90 to 119 minutes</td>
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<td>More than 149</td>
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<td>150 to 179 minutes</td>
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<td>More than 179</td>
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Source: ChooseMyPlate.gov

Eating Patterns of Preschoolers

• Milk
  - Preschoolers over the age of 24 months drink 2% milk more than any other kind of milk

• Vegetables
  - Top five vegetables consumed by children 2 - 3 years of age are: French fries, cooked green beans, cooked corn, cooked broccoli, mashed potatoes

• Fruit
  - Top five fruits consumed by children 2 - 3 years of age are: fresh apple, banana, grapes, strawberries and canned applesauce

• Sweetened beverages
  - Top sweetened beverages consumed by children 2 - 3 years of age are: fruit-flavored drinks, carbonated beverages, sweet tea and coffee

Source: Fox et al., (2010)
Why is snacking important?

• Major changes to eating habits in general have been noted during the same period of time as the increase in the prevalence of obesity.
• Increased are:
  - Number of snacking occasions
  - Portion sizes
  - Energy density of foods
  - Caloric intakes
  - Amounts of food eaten away from home

These changes have also been noted in the eating patterns of children.


Number of Snacking Occasions

- Do not allow children to ‘graze’
  - Often young children will eat throughout the day and then refuse to eat at mealtime because they are not hungry
  - Avoid this by offering snacks and meals around the same time each day
- Offer 1 or 2 snacks per day
- Plan snack time midway between meals

Portion sizes

- Young children eat according to their appetites
- Children’s energy needs depend on:
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Physical activity level
  - Growth rate
- External eating cues
  - Overeating is more likely to occur when served large portions than when served smaller age-appropriate servings

Source: Looney & Raynor (2011)

Energy Density of Foods

- Number of calories per ounce of food
  - More calories = higher energy density
- Foods high in fat tend to have a high energy density
  - Grain based desserts are often high in calories. Foods such as cookies, cakes, pies and some crackers are high in added fat and consequently relatively high in calories
  - Whole milk is higher in fat than 1% or nonfat milk
- Foods high in water tend to have a low energy density
  - Fruits and vegetables
- The energy density of a meal is increased by the use of spreads, dressings and gravies

Source: Looney & Raynor (2011)

Why is snacking important? Food eaten away from home

- 70% of calories consumed by children 2 - 6 years are eaten at home.
  - Home calorie consumption has been declining when compared to earlier surveys conducted in 1977 (85%), 1989 (79%), 1994 (75%)
- 30% of calories are consumed away from home.
  - 17% of calories is from fast food

Parents still have control of the majority of food eaten by preschool children.

Source: Poti & Popkin (2011)
What foods should be offered at snack time?

- Dietary Guidelines for Americans
  - Balancing calories to manage weight
    - The number of calories that preschool children need depends on their age, gender, physical activity level and rate of growth
  - Foods and food components to reduce
    - Solid fats, added sugars and sodium
      - Foods such as:
        - Grain based desserts
        - Sweetened beverages
  - Foods and nutrients to increase
    - Increase whole grains, vegetables & fruits, seafood
    - Increase potassium, dietary fiber, calcium, vitamin D
    - Building healthy eating patterns
  - Choose MyPlate


MyPlate

- Vegetables and fruits
  - Make half your plate fruits and vegetables
- Grain
  - Make at least half of your grains whole grains
- Protein foods
  - With protein foods variety is key: seafood, poultry, meats, eggs, beans & peas, nuts and seeds
- Dairy
  - Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk

What foods should be offered at snack time?

Choose MyPlate.gov
What foods should be offered at snack time?

- MyPlate
  - Vegetables and fruits
    - Red pepper rings, carrots and celery sticks
    - Mandarin oranges, canned peaches, raisins
    - Limit juice to one 6 ounce cup per day
  - Grain
    - Whole grain cereal
    - Whole wheat crackers
    - Toast
  - Protein foods
    - Peanut butter
    - Hard boiled eggs
    - Tuna fish
  - Dairy
    - String cheese
    - Yogurt
    - Pudding made with low-fat milk
    - Cottage cheese
    - Low-fat or fat-free milk
    - Calcium fortified soy milk

When planning snacks, include foods from at least two food groups.

Advice for parents

- A child’s appetite is the best indicator of how much, if any, food he/she should eat at snack or meal time
- Offer snacks at regular times
- Be patient with new foods
  - Caregivers may need to offer a new food 10 to 12 times before a child will accept it
- Let little helpers help
- Be a good role model

How can we get preschoolers to eat?

- Advice for parents
  - Talk with your child’s healthcare professional to determine if your child’s weight is a concern
  - Offer the same foods to everyone in the family
  - Keep everyone in the family ‘on the move’
  - Do not buy foods you do not want your child to eat
  - Have regular snack and meal times
  - Serve age-appropriate servings and allow for seconds
  - Praise good behavior with hugs and kisses, not food
  - Be a good role model
How can we get preschoolers to eat?

- Advice for parents
  - Walk the talk
  - Cook together
  - Eat together
  - Demonstrate balance
  - Show respect
    - Respect the child’s appetite
    - Respect the child’s stage of development
  - Plan snacks
    - Keep it simple
    - Keep it small

In conclusion –

- Improving Nutrition in Preschoolers
  - Parents choose mealtimes, not children
  - Provide a wide variety of nutrient dense foods
  - Pay attention to portion size
  - Use non-fat or low-fat dairy products
  - Limit snacking during sedentary behavior or in response to boredom
  - Restrict use of sweet/ sweetened beverages as snacks
  - Allow self-regulation of total calorie intake


Recommended handouts for parents of preschoolers

- Be a healthy role model for children
- Kid-friendly veggies and fruits
- Cut back on your kid’s sweet treats

Available at: http://www.choosemyplate.gov/healthy-eating-tips/ten-tips.html
Health Resources

- Grow It, Like It, Try It [https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/growit_book1.pdf]
- Eat Play Grow. [http://www.eatplaygrow.org/]

References