



"We serve education every day."

Sensible Snacking

If you have children, chances are you've uttered the phrase, "No snacking between meals!" In fact, when it comes to children and the alarming obesity epidemic facing them, restricting snack choices may seem like a good idea. The mere mention of the word "snack" often conjures up pictures of potato chip bags, candy bars, ice cream cones and bottles of sugary soda. The fact of the matter is that when we think of snacks, we often think of one group – junk food. While it may be beneficial to restrict your child from indulging in these types of foods, the truth is that snacks can be a perfectly healthy part of their daily diet. In fact, armed with a few tips and guidelines, you can ensure that your kids are staying refueled and energized throughout the day.

One of the challenges we face in school food service is how to provide snacks that are both appetizing and nutritious. By adopting the New York State School Nutrition Association "Choose Sensibly Guidelines", we have a system that helps us to select snacks that are low in fat and sugar as well as appealing to students. All snacks served in our schools must have less than 7 grams total fat and 2 grams of saturated fat. They must also have 15 mg or less of sugar and 360 mg or less of sodium. Although this makes it challenging to find foods that fit the bill, we believe it is essential that we do all we can to provide our children with healthy choices.

You can implement these guidelines at home or develop your own set of rules when it comes to snacking. In addition to limiting fat and sugar, here are some other tips to help you and your family to "Choose Sensibly".

- Buy snacks that are individually portioned or make your own by using snack-size sandwich bags, in most cases limiting the amount to 1 ounce or less.
- Plan snacks into your daily diet.
- Choose snacks that contain complex carbohydrates and mix them with lean protein for lasting energy. Trail mix, low fat cheese with multi-grain crackers, and peanut butter on whole grain bread are all good choices.
- Fruits make perfect portable snacks because they come pre-packaged in their own skins!
- Wash and cut up vegetables as soon as you get them home from the store. Serve with a low fat dip to make them more kid-friendly.
- Limit high calorie beverages such as soda and energy drinks. Replace them with plain or flavored water.

Remember, kids who eat regular meals and healthy snacks have higher test scores, better school attendance and fewer behavioral problems. Providing children with good nutrition now enables them to learn, play, grow, and develop into healthy adults. By working together, schools and families can make a difference in the fight against childhood obesity.