

Fun Treats, Smart Eats

Children in the United States are snacking more than ever, according to a study published in *The Journal of Pediatrics*. Research shows snacking between meals now provides more than 600 calories, or 25 percent of children's daily calorie needs, as compared to 450 calories (18 percent), 25 years ago.

Food analysts indicate that more than 90 percent of children ages eight to 17 prefer snacking after school more than any other time of day. Children's top salty snack picks include: potato chips (96 percent), popcorn (94 percent), crackers (92 percent) and pretzels (80 percent). (Source: Kids Snacking Survey, August 2005)

Researchers from the University of North Carolina found that when compared to regular meals, typical snack choices provide less calcium and higher calories and fat, which can result in higher body weight.

The epidemic of overweight, yet undernourished, children now affects more than nine million children and teens in the United States. This has been attributed to several factors: families eating out more, larger food portions, higher calorie snacks, no time for breakfast and a reduced intake of nutrient-dense foods such as whole grains, fruit, vegetables and dairy. (Source: *Pediatrics*, February 2005)

Choosing healthy snack foods that add vitamins and minerals without excessive calories can help children meet daily nutrient requirements that may be missed at meal times. (Source: Position Statement on Nutrient Rich Foods in Children's Diets, May 2009)

Children need healthy snacks, or "mini meals" to help them get the nutrients they need. Pediatricians recommend that young children eat small meals four to six times a day since they have limited stomach capacity and need extra calories for development.

According to the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, children are falling short on five critical nutrients -- calcium, fiber, magnesium, vitamin E and potassium. All milks, including flavored varieties and other dairy foods provide three out of these five nutrients lacking in children's diets.

Parents' eating behaviors may influence a child's snack and beverage choices. A study published in the *Journal of Nutrition* found that mothers can positively impact their daughters' bone health by drinking milk. Results showed moms who drank milk had daughters who drank more milk and fewer sodas.

According to *Food Technology Magazine*, children are attempting to eat healthier foods. In fact, one-third of children ages eight to 17 years old consult a parent before they snack. Yogurt is the fastest growing healthful snack choice among younger children, with a 14 percent increase in sales in the past five years, followed by fresh fruit. (Source: *Flavor and the Menu Magazine*, Winter 2005)