

# NETA Quarterly News

Nutrition, Physical Activity & Gardening for  
Early Childhood Providers

## It's Your Classroom... Make it a Healthy One!

Snacks are vital to young children's health. Setting clear standards for parents about which snacks are allowed in your classroom and being a good role model for your students by eating healthy snacks yourself can help create lifelong healthy eating habits for your students.

Teachers often express concern about snacks that children bring from home. "Hot chips" are a popular choice. This flaming red snack food contains 11 grams of fat, 250 mg of sodium, and 170 calories per serving. They are loaded with artificial ingredients and light on important vitamins and nutrients. Suggesting that parents purchase baked or toasted crackers or chips instead could reduce the number of calories from fat that children eat.

Graham crackers are a great alternative to chips. They are often served at school and can be dressed up with peanut butter, jam, yogurt, fruit or cheese to make them more appealing to children. One large graham cracker has only 1.4 grams of fat, 59 calories, and 85 mg of sodium...an obviously better choice!

Donuts are another snack food often brought from home. Just six donut holes contain 17.8 grams of fat, 314 calories, and 267 mg of sodium. Whole grain English muffins or toast are a healthy substitution. They can be cut into fun shapes using cookie cutters, lightly toasted and "disguised" with any topping that you can imagine. Sprinkle a little cinnamon and sugar on top for a donut like effect. Kids love to explore new food combinations and are more likely to eat healthy food they helped to prepare!

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Remember to keep drinks healthy too. Make a no soda in the classroom policy for students **and** teachers, and stick to it! Low fat milk, water, and 100% juices are always a better choice. Let children explore their options by squeezing their own fresh juices in class. Kids will have fun, learn food preparation techniques and get exposure to a wide variety of healthy drink alternatives.

Encourage fresh fruits and vegetables at every meal and snack, and ask parents to help you reinforce your healthy eating message by sending snacks that follow these simple guidelines.

*It's Your Classroom...Your  
Rules...Make it a healthy one!*

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# Snacking Smart

Snacking often gets a bad rap but it's what you snack **on** that matters most. Foods marketed as "snack foods" are usually highly processed foods full of salt and sugar. A snack of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and/or low-fat dairy can be a healthy addition to any diet, and for children aged 3-5 snacks are essential.

Preschoolers tend to be active and can burn a lot of calories. Depending on age, gender and activity level, 3-5 year-olds require anywhere from 1000 to 1600 calories per day. With their small stomachs it can be hard to get that much food without snacking. Most experts recommend that children of

preschool age be offered 3 meals and at least 2 snacks each day.

Many preschoolers eat sporadically. They may eat little or nothing at a meal, and then eat a lot at snack time. This is normal and should **not** be discouraged. It is important for kids to learn to eat when they are hungry and until they are satisfied, but children that get most of their calories from snacks need those snack to be nutrient packed. Think of snacks as an opportunity to infuse a child's diet with vitamins, minerals, fiber and everything else their diet needs, not just a way to tide them over until the next meal.

## It is okay to include an occasional treat.

This gives kids a chance to learn moderation and keeps unhealthy foods from gaining the additional appeal of "forbidden fruit." The majority of your offerings should come from:

### FRUITS

- Fresh fruits are great but don't forget about dried fruit.
- 100% fruit juice offers the same vitamins as the fruit but not the fiber.
- Fruit blended into a smoothie retains its fiber.
- Keep the peel. It contains a lot of the fruit's fiber and vitamins.

### VEGETABLES

- Vegetables are an important source of vitamins and minerals.
- Color is a good indicator of the nutrients contained in fruits and vegetables. Make sure your students are getting the full spectrum by serving vegetables (and fruits) of many colors.

### GRAINS

- MyPyramid says ½ your grains should be whole grains, up your students' ratio by offering whole grains at school.
- Read labels. Just because a food is brown or "multigrain" doesn't mean it is whole grain - check the ingredients for the word "whole".

### CALCIUM RICH FOODS

- Dairy products are naturally high in calcium, just be sure to choose low-fat versions.
- Students who don't eat dairy can get calcium from fortified orange juice or soymilk and from leafy green vegetables.

### PROTEIN

- Nuts are a good source of protein and healthy fats, but make sure you are aware of any allergies.
- Beans are a great high-protein, high-fiber, low-fat finger food for tiny hands.

### References:

USDA MyPyramid for Kids at:

CDC Nutrition for Everyone: Quick Tips: Healthy Children, Healthy Choices at:

E. Satter, "Feeding Is Parenting" The Vision Times Issue 4, Fall 2006

# Creative Snacks with District Foods

**D**o you have extra apple slices and/or apple juice? Try this crunchy popcorn treat!

## SPICED APPLE POPCORN

### Ingredients:

- 1 3-oz. bag low-fat microwave popcorn
- 1 cup apple slices
- 1 cup unsweetened apple juice
- 1 tbsp cinnamon (plus a sprinkle to finish)
- ¼ cup sugar

### To Make:

1. In a saucepan, combine the apples, juice, cinnamon and sugar. Let simmer for about 8 minutes. Then take off heat to cool to room temperature (keep this liquid)
2. Spoon out apple slices and place on paper towel, cover and let dry over night.
3. Next day, make popcorn, mix in apple slices and dribble juice mixture over until coated.
4. Spice up with more cinnamon as needed.

The recipe serves 6 with 124 calories, 26.8 g of carbohydrates, 3.2 grams of fiber, 1.4 g of fat, .2 g of saturated fat, 1.9 grams of protein and over 18 mg of vitamin C.

**Sometimes it just takes a few additions or a different combination to change the usual food service snacks into a fun and healthy treat.**

**T**ry mixing these commonly provided snacks for a more interesting handful.

## SNACK ATTACK MIX

### Ingredients:

- O's cereal (or other unsweetened cereal)
- Raisins
- Dry roasted peanuts
- Dry roasted sunflower seeds
- Optional: add seasoning salt or your favorite spice(s)

### To Make:

1. Mix equal parts of all ingredients into a large Ziploc bag
2. Add seasoning if desired, shake and serve

Each ½ cup serving has 274 calories, 26.9 g of carbohydrates, 8.4 g of protein, 17.2 g of fat, 2.1 g of saturated fat, 4.0 g of fiber, 5.6 mg of vitamin E and 102 mcg of folate.

**C**arrots are familiar to most preschoolers. That can be great for timid eaters who shy away trying new vegetables, but they can bore your more adventurous eaters. Please both groups by transforming the usual carrot sticks into carrot dogs with this easy recipe.

## CARROT DOGS

### Ingredients:

- Sliced whole wheat bread
- 1 tsp reduced fat ranch dressing
- 2 medium baby carrots

### To Make:

1. Spread 1 tsp of ranch dressing on a piece of whole wheat bread, add a couple of baby carrots, roll and eat... just like a carrot "hot" dog

Each "dog" has 87 calories, 14 g of carbohydrates, 3.8 g of protein, 1.8 g of fat .3 g of saturated fat, 2.5 g of fiber and 2762 IUs of Vitamin A.

### Reference:

## Need a Break? Try an Exercise Snack

**H**ave you found that your preschoolers are moody and uncooperative? Exercise snacks might be the solution for you. They can calm a restless class and stop the squirming.

Preschoolers want and need to move frequently; about once every 60 minutes! Though you may not have time for complicated games and activities every hour, a quick burst

of physical activity will stop the fidgeting and allow them to focus on learning. Adequate activity will also improve their health and help them develop important motor skills.

Here are a few ideas:

- Reinforce body part vocabulary – have students tap their toes, head, eyebrows, chin, chest, etc.
- Play catch games (using props is a great way to build motor skills)
- Play some music and let them dance
- Play stretching games
- “Duck, Duck, Goose”
- “London Bridge”
- “I’m a Little Teapot”
- “Simon Says”

After a couple of rounds, your preschoolers will be calmer and more able to listen and follow directions, at least until its time for their next exercise snack!

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### Reference:



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