

Children's snacks

Snacks aimed at children are often loaded with fat, salt and sugar, with little nutritional value, such as chocolate, muffins, biscuits, chips, fries, and savoury crackers. Others may offer some nutrition, but are too high in kilojoules and so risk blunting a child's appetite for a healthy meal later on. Other snacks aren't quite filling enough and leave your child asking for more food an hour later.

Small healthy snacks make good sense, particularly when children get home from school ravenous. Ideal snacks are based on vegetables, fruit, dairy and wholegrains. Include a source of carbohydrate, protein, and fat.

Fruit

- fresh fruit
- fruit packed in own juice
- dried fruit – eg apricots and sultanas.

Vegetables

- veggie sticks and cherry tomatoes with a dip such as hummus
- vegetable pikelets – your usual pikelet mix with creamed corn, grated zucchini, carrot and cheese
- homemade wedges made from potatoes, carrots, sweet potato. Toss in a little olive or canola oil and cook in a hot oven
- a mug of homemade soup or a low salt one from the supermarket (see pea soup overleaf)

Dairy

- yoghurt – some low fat flavoured yoghurts can be high in sugar, while others are a little lower. The ideal is natural yoghurt sweetened with a little honey. Either makes a good snack for children because of their high calcium content.
- cheese with celery sticks or an apple
- cheese with low salt rice crackers, crispbread
- smoothie made with fresh/frozen fruit

Nuts/other protein foods

- muesli bar. These vary in quality, with some very high in sugar and/or fat.
- small handful of nuts or trail mix
- soft or hard-boiled egg
- peanut butter sandwich

Breads and grains

- wholegrain bread, wholegrain English muffins, raisin toast, topped with a little peanut butter
- breakfast cereal – weetbix, sultana bran or mini wheats, or other wholegrain cereal
- low salt crackers or crispbread with cottage cheese and/or avocado
- homemade popcorn

What to look for in a packaged snack:

- less than 600kj
- less than 3g of saturated fat
- 2g or more of fibre
- 150mg or less of sodium (cheese will be the highest)
- 10g or less of sugar (more if fruit or dairy included)

Minted pea soup

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 leek, finely chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 3 cups salt reduced stock
- 1/3 cup mint leaves
- 1kg frozen green peas
- 1/4 cup extra-light sour cream or natural yoghurt, to serve

Heat olive oil in a large saucepan. Add leek, celery and garlic and cook for about 5 minutes. Add stock and bring to the boil, then cook until the celery is soft. Add the peas and mint, and cook for a further 3-5 minutes until peas are tender but still bright green. Cool the soup slightly and blend until smooth. Serve with light sour cream or natural yoghurt.

Try the same recipe, substituting half of the peas with chopped broccoli, and adding a quarter cup of red lentils to the mix.