

## How to make healthy snacks appeal to kids

USDA rules will require schools to offer options with greater nutrition.

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School snacks as we know them are changing. The days are numbered for candy, snack cake and most cookies currently sold in vending machines and cafeteria lines.

It's all part of broad new federal standards giving snacks the first major overhaul in decades. The goal is simple: weed out junk food and replace it with something with nutritional value. The new U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) snack rules won't go into effect until the 2014-2015 school year, but there's nothing stopping schools from getting an early jump start. Several school districts, including Gwinnett County, City of Decatur Schools and Carrollton City Schools, have already begun making changes.

And it's not just schools getting rid of empty-calorie snacks in favor of nutrient-dense snacks.

At the new YMCA Youth & Teen Development Center on Memorial Drive, this center opened last month with a new kind of vending machine called "Human" vending machines. Unlike vending machines known for spitting out chocolate bars and potato chips, this new kind of machine

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Back-to-school food can be fun for kids. Foods with dips are always a hit. KENT D. JOHNSON / KJOHNSON@AJC.COM

### TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR KIDS TO DIG EATING HEALTHY

1. Have the kids make their own snacks for lunch.
2. Use small baggies and large chips so less fit in.
3. Have kids bring home what they don't eat so you can discuss if they liked or didn't like something.
4. It's OK to give less healthy snacks on certain days — like field trips when everything has to be disposable.
5. Use colorful containers — kids love them and that encourages eating the food inside.

Source: Dr. Stephanie Walsh, medical director of child wellness at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta

## Healthy, fun food options

### Snacks

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dispenses only healthy snacks — squeezable fruit, yogurt, Pirate Booty popcorn, even a can of light tuna fish with crackers. And the soda machine doesn't sell Coke or any sugary soda, but instead is lined with bottled water, Vitaminwater and small bottles of Powerade.

"To be honest, we were kind of concerned about push back," said Dedric Ross, director of the new YMCA center on Memorial Drive. "But there has been none. If (the kids) are hungry, they make good choices — in this case, it's the only choices."

Since last month, he's watched a steady stream of hungry youngsters nosh on applesauce, yogurt and rice cracker chips. But he also sees the limits to what he or anyone else can do when it comes to eating healthy. A Pizza Hut sits across the street, and there's nothing stopping the kids from pooling their snack money together to order a large pie.

The new snack rules face similar limits at school. Kids can still make a quick stop at a convenience store; parents can still send whatever they want in a backpack or lunchbox.

That said, with a growing concern over alarmingly high childhood obesity rates, more attention is being given to what our children eat not only at mealtime, but also what goes in the tummy between breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Wendy Palmer, a registered dietitian at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, believes healthy snacking can make a dent in obesity rates. She said healthy snacking ensures the child has the right fuel between meals.

A snack that includes a mix of protein and fiber, fruits and vegetables will provide a longer-lasting source of energy than a quick sugar fix. The key, she said, to healthy snacks is incorporating at least two food groups, preferably three such as whole grains, fruits and dairy. (Examples include an apple with peanut butter or whole-grain crackers, a low-fat cheese stick and blueberries.)

Experts also say it's important to remember snacks are not designed to be treats, and parents should try to avoid processed foods such as cereal bars and other packaged foods that pack a lot of calories — but very little nutrition.

Palmer said giving children choices can help with getting buy-in for eating nutritious fare. She suggests making a healthy snack drawer or a healthy snack shelf in the refrigerator, and let the children choose from a wide selection. Include fruits and vegetables you know your child likes, she added.



A lunch box bursting with homemade lunch items that are easy to make and take to school: granola, hummus, yogurt, celery slices and carrot sticks, complemented by tuna melts on mini pitas and fresh blueberries and strawberries. KENT D. JOHNSON / KJOHNSON@AJC.COM

### 160 CALORIE (OR LESS) HEALTHY SNACKS

- 1 cup carrots and 3 tablespoons hummus (125 calories)
- Small whole-wheat pita bread and 3 tablespoons hummus (149 calories)
- 1 cup celery and 1 1/2 tablespoons peanut butter (155 calories)
- 1/2 cup plain low-fat yogurt and 1 cup strawberries (123 calories)
- 1 cup grapes and a hard-boiled egg (140 calories)
- 1 orange (or 20 grapes) and 1 string cheese (139 calories)
- 1 medium banana and 1 cup of air-popped popcorn (or 1 rice cake) (140 calories)
- 20 almonds (138 calories)
- 1 cup toasted oats cereal and 1/2 cup fat-free milk (145 calories)
- 1/2 whole-wheat English muffin with 2 tablespoons tomato sauce and 3 tablespoons mozzarella (138 calories)
- Whole-wheat mini bagel and 1 tablespoon low-fat cream cheese (140 calories)
- 12 baby carrots and 1 tablespoon of almond butter (140 calories)
- 1 slice of whole-grain bread topped with 1 teaspoon nut butter (peanut butter/almond butter/cashew butter) and a sliced banana (140 calories)

### 140 CALORIE (OR LESS) SNACKS AS OCCASIONAL "TREATS"

- 1/2 cup vanilla frozen yogurt with 1/2 cup strawberries (137 calories)
- 12 baked tortilla chips and 1/2 cup salsa (132 calories)
- 2 cups kettle corn popcorn (about 140, sometimes less depending on brand)

**Note:** Experts say just how often parents should serve a treatlike snack is an individual choice, but they suggest parents think about how often they are serving it now and aim for somewhere around once per week.

Source: Children's Healthcare of Atlanta's Strong4Life.com

Experts also recommend dips for snacking. In fact, Palmer said research shows including a dip boosts fruit and vegetable consumption. So whether it's natural peanut butter for apple slices or carrots, or a low-fat yogurt dip for veggie slices, including a dip can be the key to more healthy eating, they say.

And skip the sugary drinks, even fruit juices, and always go with water to accompany the snacks. If your child doesn't like the taste of plain water, squeeze a little lemon or orange.

Keith Kantor, a Norcross nutritionist and author of the book "What Matters: Leadership Values That Just Might Save America," which is about health care, nutrition and government, said mandating change won't change behaviors unless

families eat healthier. Children, he said, need to know an apple is better for them than a cupcake — and why.

Some of his favorite snack ideas include hummus and carrots, and a breadless sandwich made with romaine lettuce leaves, chicken, sliced tomato, and mustard. Both are under-200-calorie snacks. Swap out the nacho chips for cucumbers, and dip the veggie into salsa and guacamole, he said, for another tasty, good-for-you snack.

But his all-time favorite snack idea for kids is five celery sticks lathered with all-natural peanut butter and topped with raisins — otherwise known as "ants on a log."

"Here's the goal," he said. "To make it cool again to eat healthy."