

PREVENTING CHILDHOOD OBESITY - Part 3

Choosing Healthy Snacks

Training Curriculum: Survey Question 3

OBJECTIVES

1. Staff will be able to list some healthy snack choices for children.
2. Staff will identify ways to encourage children to eat healthy snacks.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Participant Handout: Snacks for Kids
Nutrition Education Survey Plan
Nutrition Education Module for Question 3
WIC Staff Reference Sheet: Choosing Healthy Snacks

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Importance of Snacks in a Child's Diet

When you hear the word 'snack,' what kind of foods come to your mind?

After getting responses, review the points made in the first two paragraphs of the staff reference sheet. Reinforce that snacks are an important part of a child's daily nutritional intake since they cannot get enough nutrition in three meals. Unfortunately, snacks have become equated with chips, corn curls, and other 'snack foods' which are often low in nutrients rather than viewed as a mini-meal.

B. Examples of Healthy Snacks

Break into groups of 4 and instruct each group to make a list of the 5 best and 5 worst snacks to give children ages 2 to 5 and why. Ask them to draw from their personal experiences, if applicable, and if not, what they think would be good/poor snack choices. Have each group discuss their list, writing down their responses by grouping into best/worst categories. Have them explain why they rated the snacks as they did. Supplement their answers with the suggestions listed in the flyer.

Ideally, snacks should fit into the Food Guide Pyramid guidelines. However, they should also be:

- appealing - fun, made by the kids themselves, easy to chew.
- safe - to reduce the risk for choking for children under 4,

Avoid foods that are:

Hard: hard candies, tough meat, pretzels, chips, nuts, popcorn, raw vegetables
Sticky: peanut butter (use a thin spread instead), marshmallows

Round: hot dog slices, grapes

Cut food like grapes and hot dogs into long, thin strips to prevent it from getting lodged in the throat.

Sit down while eating.

Parents need information on how to make healthy choices and how to get their children to like them.

Optional: Prepare a tray of healthy snacks that would be appealing to kids. Have staff taste test the snacks and rate them for nutrition, safety and "kid appeal".

C. Getting Children to Eat Healthy Snacks

Tell me about your own experiences dealing with children who want sweet and salty treats.

How does it feel?

Reinforce that parents often get 'worn down' by their child. Emotionally, it is also hard to deny children what they want even if they know it isn't the best choice.

How do children first learn to ask for chips and coke?

See parents eating them, they see them on TV, their parents offer them.

Some kids will eat healthy snacks, if offered, but many hold out for sweet and salty treats.

Children like to eat what tastes good to them!

What advice would you give the parent of a child who refuses to eat healthy snacks and whines until he gets what wants?

Allow staff to respond, being sure to include the points listed in the staff reference sheet and the participant flyer.

D. Snacks and Appetite Control

Some parents say that snacks will spoil their child's appetite.

What advice would you give them?

Be sure the following points get mentioned in the discussion.

Parents should schedule snacks around the times that their child usually gets hungry. That way, children develop hunger cues at consistent times. A schedule also makes children feel secure because they know they will be fed. If snacks are well planned and are offered at appropriate intervals, they will not spoil a child's appetite. Snacks become a problem if:

- they are given right before a meal
- they are considered as 'special sweet or salty treats' rather than a mini-meal
- they are given when a child is bored, agitated or frustrated rather than hungry. (Children

who eat for reasons other than hunger may have trouble regulating their appetite and controlling their weight later on.)

If a child gets tired and cranky before a meal, encourage parents to readjust snack times. Perhaps the child needs a small snack an hour or so before the meal. Offering a small snack may actually make the child less cranky, more willing to eat at mealtime and more pleasant at the table. If the child isn't hungry before meals, also suggest that the parent adjust the schedule or serve a lighter snack before meals.

REVIEW OF THE NUTRITION EDUCATION MODULE AND HANDOUTS

Distribute the Nutrition Education Survey Plan, Nutrition Education Module for Survey Question 3 and the participant handouts to staff. Have staff read the entire module and the corresponding flyer. After everyone is finished reading, review the module and flyer by discussing the following:

This module introduces the concept of snacks by referring to the parent's answer to question 3 on the survey.

On question 3, how likely is it that parent will choose answer e?

The module assumes that few people will!

What would you do in the unlikely event that someone does choose answer e?

Allow staff to respond. Suggest that they ask the parent why she feels that sweet and salty snack choices need not be limited. Perhaps she feels out of control of her child's food choices and so therefore has to justify her child's behavior by saying that it is "OK." Depending on how parents answer, you may have to work with them individually rather than follow the format in the module.

Assuming that the parent believes that snacks should be limited to some degree, what are some typical answers parents would give if asked which snacks their child likes?

Allow staff to respond.

The next two questions are designed to assess if excess snacks are making mealtimes problematic for the parents. The module directs staff to word their comments in a way that corresponds to the parents response. The points in the participant flyer will be helpful whether or not the parent is currently having problems with her child's eating habits. Review some of the tips in the flyer, emphasizing the ones which seem most applicable to the problems that the mother has stated. When reviewing the tips to be a good role model.

Conclude the contact by asking the parents which ideas they will try. Make a note of what she is willing to do right on the survey and follow through with her at the next visit.

PRACTICE SESSION - USING THE NUTRITION EDUCATION MODULE

Role-play the module in front of the group. Ask for volunteers to play the part of a typical caretaker while you play the more difficult part of the nutrition aide. (You may want to ask for some volunteers prior to the training session.)

For each role-play, the care giver should have a different problem or situation. Some suggestions include:

"my kid eats junk all the time"

"snacks are spoiling his mealtime"

"care giver's child already eats healthy snacks and doesn't have any concerns"

Be prepared to make some mistakes so staff realize that the role playing is a learning experience not a "command performance." After each role-play, get feedback from staff by asking the following questions:

What part of the contact did you especially like?

What could be done to improve the contact?

After doing several role plays, have divide the group into pairs and practice some role plays on their own. If they are reluctant to do individual role-plays, do a 'group role play' by dividing the group in half. Assign each 'half' to play the role of nutritionist or the parents. Keep the discussion between teams by asking questions such as the following:

You are the nutritionist who is about to discuss snacking. How would you get started? (Tell them to refer to the module.) (Elicit response from the 'nutritionist group')

Then ask the participant group, "What might a participant say in return?" (Elicit response from participant group.)

Then again ask the nutritionist group to respond.

Continue working with the group, trying to get them accustomed to using the module.

Choosing Snacks Wisely

WIC Staff Reference Sheet

Children *need* healthy snacks! Their stomachs are too small to meet their nutritional needs in just three meals. Snacks will not spoil a child's appetite. However, problems at mealtimes will occur if parents make the snacks more attractive than the food on the dinner plate.

The problems with a child's food preferences begin when a busy mom hears, "I'm hungry." Without really thinking, she may reach for what is quick and easy, perhaps a cookie or some chips. The next time, her child says, "I want chips!" Then parents feel trapped between giving children what they ask for and what they really need! After all, parents want their children to be happy! WIC staff can provide parents with tips which will help them use snacks appropriately and avoid falling into this trap.

Encourage parents to think of snacks as mini-meals, an important part of their child's total nutrition. Ask parents what percent of their child's nutrition come from snacks. They may be surprised to learn that as much as half the calories that a child eats each day comes in between meals. Besides calories, what nutrients do these snacks contain?

Although children may naturally prefer the salty taste of chips and the sweetness of cookies, they can learn to enjoy a sweet piece of fruit or a crisp piece of celery instead. Here is what parents can do to teach their children to enjoy healthy snacks. (This information is also repeated in the participant flyer.)

- ♥ Serve *healthy* snacks like fresh fruit slices, cheese or tuna and crackers, unsweetened dry cereals, mini sandwiches, mini pizzas made with half an English muffin, cheese and sauce, mini bagels, and for children over three, crisp vegetables. (Kids like to dip them!) Leftovers can make great snacks too.
- ♥ Give your child a choice between several healthy snacks. If he wants something sweet or salty instead tell him that this is what you have today and ask if he wants any. Be firm. Let him miss a snack if he refuses. Children will eat healthy snacks when they are hungry. But, they will eat chocolate any time!
- ♥ Schedule snacks around times your child is hungry. If she gets hungry and cranky before meals, you may need to adjust the snack schedule. Offering a small snack an hour or more before a meal may make her less grumpy and more willing to eat at mealtime.
- ♥ Avoid giving snacks to comfort, bribe or reward your child. Children who eat when bored or frustrated may have problems controlling their weight later on. Treat snacks the same way you treat other foods. You wouldn't offer broccoli to comfort or reward your child! Why offer candy? Comfort your child by talking to him, hugging him and playing with him!

- ♥ Serve snacks in interesting sizes and shapes. Offer them in a colorful bag. Cut out sandwiches with a cookie cutter. Visit the library for cookbooks which have ideas on making food 'fun' for children.
- ♥ Avoid letting your child feel deprived. Offer cookies and chips occasionally. Include them in a meal. Instead of mashed potato, have potato chips once in a while. Give a cookie for dessert.
- ♥ Tell relatives and care givers about good snacks to offer or provide them yourself. You will need their support or your attempts will fail.
- ♥ Let your child help shop. She can put healthy snacks, like shiny apples and bagels, into the cart.
- ♥ Limit your child's exposure to snack food advertisements by limiting TV viewing.
- ♥ As your child gets older, keep a supply of snacks he can choose for himself such as a bowl of fruit or cheese and crackers.
- ♥ Set a good example by eating healthy snacks yourself.

Snacks For Kids



Does your child enjoy snacks *more* than the food on the dinner plate? Does your child see snacks as *special treats*? If so, you may have trouble getting your child to eat well at mealtime. Here are some ways to prevent snacks from spoiling your child's dinner.

- ♥ Children *cannot* eat enough 'good nutrition' in just three meals. Think of snacks as small meals in between. Serve *healthy* snacks like fresh fruit slices, cheese or tuna and crackers, dry cereals, mini sandwiches, mini pizzas (made with half an English muffin, cheese and sauce), mini bagels and for children over three, crisp vegetables with dip. Leftovers make good snacks too.
- ♥ Give your child a choice between several healthy snacks. If he wants something sweet or salty instead tell him that this is what you have today and ask if he wants any. Be firm. Let him miss a snack if he refuses. Children will eat healthy snacks when they are hungry. But, they will eat chocolate any time!
- ♥ Schedule snacks around times your child is hungry. Offering a small snack an hour or more before a meal may make her less grumpy and more willing to eat at mealtime. If she isn't hungry at meals, you may need to adjust the snack schedule or serve a lighter snack.
- ♥ Avoid giving snacks to comfort, bribe or reward your child. Children who eat when bored or frustrated may have problems controlling their weight later on. Treat snacks the same way you treat other foods. You wouldn't offer broccoli to comfort or reward your child! Why offer candy? Comfort your child by talking to him, hugging him and playing with him.
- ♥ Serve snacks in interesting sizes and shapes. Offer them in a colorful bag. Cut out sandwiches with a cookie cutter. Visit the library for cookbooks that have ideas on making food 'fun' for children.
- ♥ Avoid letting your child feel deprived. Offer cookies and chips occasionally. Include them in a meal. Instead of mashed potato, have potato chips once in a while. Give a cookie for dessert.
- ♥ Tell relatives and care givers about good snacks to offer or provide them yourself. You will need their support or your attempts will fail.
- ♥ Teach your child about good nutrition while shopping. Point out the healthy choices. Let her put the ones she wants into the cart.
- ♥ Limit your child's exposure to snack food commercials by limiting TV.
- ♥ As your child gets older, keep snacks on hand that he can get himself, like fresh fruit or cheese cubes.
- ♥ Set a good example by eating healthy snacks yourself. If you buy treats on occasion, keep them out of your child's reach.

Remember: Children can learn to like healthy foods!

The Pennsylvania WIC Program
1-800-WIC-WINS



WE'RE THERE.

For Your Health. For Your Community.

DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH
Mark Schweiker, Governor



Robert S. Zimmerman, Jr. Secretary of Health

Choosing Healthy Snacks: Survey Question 3

On the survey, you mentioned that foods like chips and candy should be limited. Many children don't share that opinion. They would like to eat them all the time if they could!

What kinds of snacks does your child usually ask for between meals?

Assess what child is getting in between meals.

Do you feel your child eats better at meals or at snacks?

Assess how the child is eating.

Mealtime can be/become a problem if children prefer the foods they eat between meals. After a while, they start asking for chips and cookies instead of apples or cheese.

How do you feel about your child's snack choices?

Is the mother content or having problems?

Here are some ideas to help you help your child choose healthy foods.

Or...Here are some ideas to help you improve your child's food choices.

Review the tips in the flyer that pertain to the parent's situation. (You may not have time to go over all of them but pick out a few to pique her interest. She can read the other points on her own.)

Which ideas will you try?

Perhaps the best way to get children to eat healthy snacks is to be a good role model. **What kinds of snacks could you eat to be a good example for your child?**