

Lesson 1.7: Offer Healthy Snacks

Background (Read before you teach): Snacking among US children has increased over the past three decades (Piernas & Popkin, 2010). Among children ages 2-6 years, more than one-fourth (28%) of their total calories comes from snacks. High-fat salty snacks and desserts and regular soft drinks are the major sources of calories from snacks in children.



Just as parents and caregivers should decide when and what to serve for dinner, they are also the decision-makers about snacks. However, caregivers may not always see snacks as important to their children's nutritional needs (Blaine et al., 2016).

Choosing healthy snacks is one way to make a [shift](#) to a healthier eating pattern (USDA and HHS, 2016). Some examples include:

- Plain air-popped popcorn (a whole grain), rather than cookies
- Plain low-fat yogurt with fresh fruit rather than ice cream
- Veggies with garbanzo dip, instead of chips and sour cream
- Low-fat milk or plain water, rather than a soda

The MyPlate website also provides useful [tips on snacking](#) for parents.

Teaching Tip: Involve children in the fun snack activity, if possible. Where little daily structure exists, some participants may struggle in the “plan a day” activity. Be ready to share examples from other groups or limit the activity to scheduling and planning only one snack.

Key Message: Plan and serve healthy snacks to young children.

Target Audience: Mexican-origin families with young children, ages 3 to 8 years

Objectives: By the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Identify what foods make a healthy snack
- Explain why children need a regular structure of meals and snacks
- Plan a day of healthy snacks

Materials:

- Powerpoint slides, projector, laptop;
- Pencils and worksheet;
- **For activity and food tasting:** hummus (see Veggie Dip), whole wheat breads, carrots sticks, cherry tomatoes (in halves), broccoli, cucumber, grated cheese, paper plates (1 per participant) and small plastic bowls for supplies.

Handouts: Recipes (Veggie Dip), snack schedule worksheets

Set-up: Set up projector and laptop for slides. If it is not possible to use a slide projector, write out Edgar's day on poster paper and display ahead of class. Print a few color pictures from the slide to show to participants. Place washed vegetables pieces and cheese into small plastic bowls, arranging one set of bowls for each table or small group

Opening (Anchor): (10 min) Welcome! Review what was covered last time and ask if participants have made changes, based on their goals. Congratulate and encourage them to keep on making changes.

Today, we will be talking about how to plan and serve healthy snacks to your children. Begin the discussion with an open-ended question.

Ask: When you hear "healthy snacks", what does that mean to you? How can parents encourage children to eat healthy snacks?

Lesson (Add): (10 min) Discuss the following points:

- Show the slide with Edgar's day, describing the foods that he ate at kindergarten and at home. **Ask:** Edgar is 3 years old: what do you think about the way he ate at school and at home? Would you describe his snacks as healthy or unhealthy?
- **Ask:** Why is important to provide healthy snacks at a regular times to your child?
 - Foods eaten at snack times help children meet their needs for grains, fruit, vegetables, dairy, and proteins (meats and beans). These foods may provide at least one-fourth of their energy needs.
 - Offering healthy snacks are a good way to encourage children to eat more fruits and vegetables and to eat new foods.
 - When children eat all day long, they may fill-up on fatty, salty, or sweet snacks and won't be hungry. Eating snacks or drinking sweet beverages within an hour of a meal can ruin the appetite for the meal.

2. **Ask:** How many snacks should you offer to your children?

Young children (2-8 years) need 2-3 regular snacks, in addition to 3 meals.

3. **Ask:** What is a healthy snack? Or what can make it easier for parents to provide healthy snacks?

- Can be from any food group (fruit, vegetable, dairy, protein, grains)
- Offer more fruits and vegetables. Cut-up these foods and store them in the refrigerator for quick, easy snacks
- Offer less packaged foods (chips, cookies, microwave foods that are high in fat or sugar). If parents don't bring these foods into the house, then children will not snack on them.
- Even too much fruit juice and punches ruin appetite. Keep cold water in the refrigerator.

Can they be fun? Of course, but remember unhealthy snacks can quickly replace healthier snacks in your child's diet. If snacking while watching a movie or favorite TV show is an occasional family activity, you can still **take charge in selecting healthy snacks** for your children. Here are some ideas (show the rest of the slides)

Activity (Apply): (30 min) While the assistant starts the food demonstration, the educator leads the activity.

- Plan a day activity. **Say:** In pairs, let's plan a day of healthy meals and snacks. Using this sheet, write foods in each column from the five MyPlate food groups that you can offer your child at meals and snacks. At the top under "Hour", write the time of day your child will eat that meal or snack. (Handout pencils and worksheets). Share snack ideas.
- Fun snack activity. **Say:** Let's make a fun snack with fruit and vegetables. Parents and children will make a face or other design using raw vegetables (slices, strips, rounds).
- Food demonstration, tasting and sharing. Explain step-by-step how the hummus is prepared. Serve samples for tasting. **Ask:** What are some ways that your children can help prepare this recipe? How can you use it at home? What do you like about the recipe? What would you change?

Closing (Away): (10 min) Pair-up and set specific goals

What did you learn? Why is this information important to you? Choose a goal to work on this month. Try to choose small changes that you can make within a week. Write your goal on the recipe handout.

Ask a friend or family member to help support you in reaching your goal. Invite families to share their goals.

References and Resources:

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- (English) <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/sites/default/files/tentips/DGTipsheet13CutBackOnSweetTreats.pdf>.
- (Spanish) https://choosemyplate-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/tentips/DGTipsheet13CutBackonSweetTreats-sp_0.pdf

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