



EARLY YEARS SNACKS



Why do young children need snacks?

Young children often have small appetites and need regular meals together with 2-3 healthy snacks per day. Healthy snacks are an opportunity to meet the nutritional needs of young children by providing additional energy and important nutrients between meals. They are particularly important for those with smaller appetites

Snacks should be viewed as 'mini meals', using the same healthy foods as meals do, and not an opportunity for young children to be given what people often think of as 'snack foods' such as higher-fat, higher-salt and higher-sugar foods such as biscuits, cakes, confectionery, ice-cream and crisps.

What makes a good snack for a 1 to 4 year old? **Snacks can include foods from all the following 4 food groups:**

Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates

Sessional care – provide a starchy food such as crackers, bread sticks, rice cakes as part of most snacks.

Full day care providing meals and snacks – provide a starchy food such as crackers, bread sticks, rice cakes as part of at least one snack per day.

Provide at least 3 varieties of starchy foods across snacks each week.

Choose bread and bread products with lower salt contents. Choose those which are labelled as low green or medium amber in salt.

Fruit and vegetables

Provide vegetables and/or fruit as part of all snacks.

Dried and pureed fruit should not be provided as snacks.

Use a variety of fruit and vegetables and encourage more veg.

Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins

Foods from this group provide a useful source of iron and zinc and can be used as part of snacks once or twice per week.

Dairy and alternatives

One portion as part of a snack can contribute to the 3 portions of dairy and alternatives required daily.

A cup of milk counts as dairy if providing milk to drink or a portion of cheese or plain yoghurt.

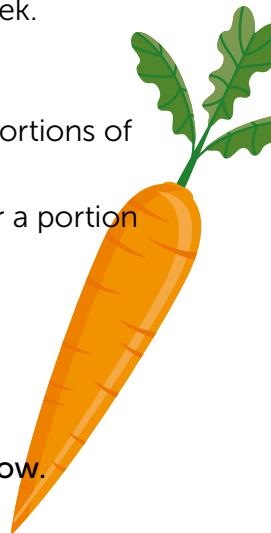
Drinks

Children must have access to drinking water.

Provide only fresh tap water or plain milk.

A snack can contain 2 or 3 of foods from the above food groups. See examples below.

If you are providing regular care, it is best to plan a snack menu to ensure variety across the week and a balanced nutritional content.



Snack ideas for 1 to 4 year olds:



Mini sardine sandwiches with cucumber sticks



Rice cakes with peanut butter and oranges



Crumpet with apple and grapes



Pitta bread fingers, mashed pea and carrot sticks



Yoghurt with apple and blackberries



Oatcakes, soft cheese with peppers

Snacks to avoid

Sugary snacks – as these can cause tooth decay, particularly if eaten between meals. Sugary snacks can also lead to excess calorie intakes. These include sweets, chocolate confectionery, biscuits, sugary pastries, sugary desserts, & sweetened cereals.

Savoury pre-packed snacks – can be high in salt and low in beneficial nutrients and are not recommended.

Children can get involved in preparing homemade snacks which will help improve their familiarity with different fruit and vegetables, and they are likely to be cheaper.

Nuts – whole nuts can cause choking in young children and should not be given. An allergy plan on the use of nut butters is recommended. You shouldn't need to avoid nut products if there are no children at risk.

Dried Fruit

Dried fruit is fine to eat as part of a pudding or after a meal but can damage teeth if eaten between meals as a snack because of their sticky and sugary consistency. Dried fruit contains sulphur dioxide as a preservative, which could be an allergen. Avoid dried fruit as a snack between meals for all children.

Childcare providers are ideally placed to encourage healthier options, and often children who refuse certain foods can be encouraged with positive reinforcement to increase the variety of healthier snack foods. Working closely with parents or carers is crucial and they should be involved in discussions about any changes to the food and drinks you provide.

Opportunities to make the most of snack times

- Practice personal hygiene by washing their hands before eating/drinking
- Learn about healthy snacks and drinks
- Develop independence and start making their own choices
- Try new foods and chat to staff about their likes and dislikes
- Talk to each other and develop social skills.