



THE 20 BEST (AND 10 WORST) FOODS FOR KIDS

Best snack choices for children? Because the body turns carbohydrates into sugar, good choices include dried and fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as protein-based snacks such as peanut butter, yogurt, cheese, or even a slice or two of low-fat deli meat. Try rolling the deli meat, maybe with a slice of cheese, into a cigar shape to make handling easier and eating more fun. Happy, healthy eating!

Written by Mindy Hermann, R.D., a nutritionist and mother of 11-year-old twin boys.

The Best:

1. American cheese. One slice has about 125 milligrams of bone-building calcium (children ages 1-3 need 500 milligrams a day; 4-8 need 800 milligrams). As a melted topping, this mildly flavored cheese can make vegetables or pasta more enticing to picky eaters.
2. Baby carrots. Pack these beta-carotene-rich vegetables in sealed plastic bags to take along to school or soccer practice. Or serve them with a low-fat dip. For babies and young toddlers, steam carrots until soft then cut into small pieces.
3. Baked potatoes. Serve this potassium-loaded, fiber-rich vegetable instead of grease fries. It's lower in fat and a great base for nutritious toppings like chili, beans, steamed broccoli or cheese.
4. Breakfast cereal. Fortified cereal is a top source of numerous vitamins and minerals, including iron and the B-vitamin folate, which builds blood cells. If your kids won't eat cereal that's not sugary, combine a sweet brand with a less sugary variety. Pediatricians frequently recommend Cheerios for early eaters and up.
5. Broccoli. Children get calcium and vitamins C and A in every bite. Many kids like it raw or lightly steamed so the vegetable stays bright green. Let kids plant "trees" in mashed potatoes, or dunk it in pasta sauce. Sprinkle it with parmesan cheese, or stir-fry it in olive or canola oil then sprinkle with low-sodium soy sauce.
6. Cantaloupe. One of the few fruits with both beta-carotene and vitamin C, it's a great alternative for kids who aren't big vegetable eaters.
7. Chocolate Milk. In an ideal world, children would gulp down plain milk without complaint. But sometimes a little flavoring can make milk more appealing. And contrary to popular belief, the chocolate does not significantly hinder calcium absorption. Another option is chocolate Ovaltine, which is fortified with vitamins.
8. Eggs. One scrambled egg is packed with protein, which builds and repairs muscles, and Vitamin D, which helps the body absorb calcium.
9. Frozen mixed vegetables. Peas supply protein and folate, a B vitamin, while green beans provide potassium. Toss them into soup as it heats, or cook and stir into leftover rice.
10. Ground Beef. A top source of protein, iron and zinc. Choose beef that's at least 90% lean to keep fat in check. Mix into chili, toss with pasta or noodles, or make burgers or meatballs.
11. Ketchup. You may think it's gross when your child douses everything in sight with ketchup, but this tomato-y condiment contains a natural cancer-fighting compound called lycopene.
12. Kiwifruit. Bite for bite, the kiwi has more vitamin C than an orange. It supplies fiber and antioxidants that help protect the body's cells from day-to-day damage.
13. Orange juice. Of all the 100% juices, O.J. is the most naturally nutritious--it's got lots of vitamin C, folate and potassium. The calcium-fortified kind is a great option for everyone, especially kids who don't drink milk or otherwise get enough calcium. Bonus: The vitamin C in the orange juice helps in the absorption of calcium.
14. Parmesan cheese. Each tablespoon of grated parmesan cheese supplies close to 10% of the daily requirement for calcium; sprinkle it on top of pasta, vegetables, salad and eggs.
15. Peanut butter. Ever-popular among kids, peanut butter is protein-rich and a good source of fiber. Spread on bread or thin with water to make a yummy dip for celery sticks, apple slices or banana chunks.



16. Pizza. This popular item dishes up three food groups at once: grains, dairy and vegetable (the tomato sauce counts as a serving). Make mini pizzas for your children with English muffins, pizza sauce, mozzarella cheese and chopped veggies.
17. Sweet potato. A toddler-size quarter-cup serving supplies all the vitamin A kids need daily. Slice it into strips, spray lightly with oil and bake into healthy fries (cut into small chunks for toddlers).
18. Tortillas. Versatile and low-fat: roll them up with turkey or ham and slice into wheels; cut them into wedges and then bake to make low-fat chips; or top with chopped veggies and melted cheese.
19. Whole-wheat bread. I started my children on fiber-rich wheat bread when they were toddlers so they'd get used to the taste of whole-grain foods. Others to try: brown rice, whole-wheat English muffins and whole-wheat pasta.
20. Yogurt. Yogurt supplies lots of calcium--275 to 450 milligrams per 8-ounce container. Look for brands that have "live and active cultures." These beneficial bacteria may boost the health of your child's intestines. Flavored yogurt can be highly sweetened, so try brands with less sugar or mix fresh fruit, maple syrup, or a little 100% fruit spread into plain yogurt. Also, steer away from brands sweetened with aspartame/NutraSweet.

Since this article was first written, nutritionists have also been recommending blueberries and watermelon for their antioxidant, cancer-fighting phytonutrients. And remember, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all children over the age of two drink skim milk.

The Worst:

1. Chicken Nuggets. Any fast food that's breaded and fried is bursting with fat. Nuggets and their dipping sauces also have a lot of sodium, which can contribute to high blood pressure in adults. Don't let your child's taste buds get used to salty foods.
2. Chips. Giving your child a handful of chips with lunch on occasion is fine, but keep in mind that potato chips, corn chips and cheese puffs are mostly fat, sodium and empty calories.
3. Doughnuts. Most are packed with artery-clogging saturated fat and trans-fatty acids. An average doughnut also has 200 to 300 calories and few other nutrients.
4. French fries. It's unfortunate that fries are the most popular vegetable dish in the U.S. I know kids love them, but they're extremely high in fat and have few vitamins. If your children clamor for them at the drive-through, at least stick with a small portion. At restaurants, substitute rice or vegetables for kids who can't read the menu yet!
5. Fruit leather. Most rolled-up dried fruit has a dab of fruit, a teeny bit of fiber, few vitamins except those that have been added, and lots of sugar. Serve fresh fruit instead.
6. Hot dogs. Regular dogs are high in fat (13 or more grams per serving), have lots of sodium, and don't provide much protein for the calories. They're also a choking hazard for children 3 and under. Serve only occasionally, look for lower-fat brands (try turkey dogs), and cut into very small pieces for young children.
7. Juice-flavored drinks. Most are no more than 10% juice; the rest is water and sweeteners. (Don't be fooled by 100% juices made from grape, pear or apple concentrate. Most of the nutrition has been removed from concentrates.)
8. Prepackaged lunches. Sure, they're convenient, but they also tend to be high in saturated fat and sodium (more than 1,200 milligrams in some, about half the recommended daily max) and packed with sugary treats. Most also are nutritionally unbalanced, because they contain no fruits or vegetables.
9. Soda. American children drink more soft drinks today than ever. The average 12-ounce can of soda supplies almost 10 teaspoons of sugar, which can contribute to obesity and tooth decay. Kids who drink soda instead of milk are also shortchanging their bones of calcium and other nutrients.
10. Toaster pastries. These contain lots of fat and not much fruit. Instead, make a piece of raisin toast for your child and serve it with all-fruit spread.