



There are healthy snack foods for hungry children



My 8-year-old granddaughter Elizabeth came over to visit me last weekend. As soon as she arrived, she complained about being hungry. I asked her if she would like an apple.

She wanted a cookie. I don't have cookies in my house. My wife and I try to eat healthy foods. Elizabeth settled for the apple.

What foods would you offer your grandchildren when they exclaim "Grandma, Grandpa, I'm hungry"? How would you respond? Would it be a cookie or an apple? This decision often creates a problem. How can you satisfy a child's hunger needs and at the same time provide them with a healthy meal or snack?

Balancing what and when we should eat is difficult. When you are on the go, meals are frequently unplanned. Often, children get home from school and need to go to baseball practice immediately. Choosing a snack "to hold them over" until dinner, can often be a challenge. Foods on the go are sometimes not healthy. Children need encouragement to make healthier choices. If these decisions are left up to the child, they will often select foods that taste good but are high in fat, sodium and sugar. Adults and children usually require education to help them learn about what foods are good for them and what foods are not.

Proper nutrition is very important for children as they grow. By eating in healthy ways, children build muscle and strong bones. Good nutrition also provides energy for play and sports. Healthy snacks should be balanced among all of the food groups. Acting as role models, adults are responsible for educating children about healthier food choices that are available.

All people who are very busy can eat in healthy ways if they plan ahead. Children should be a part of the planning process. Taking ownership of the choices children make will help them to choose the healthier foods.

What are some healthy food choices for adults and children?

Remember that a healthy snack is a balanced snack. The following items are often less expensive than fast food and much healthier. An on the go menu can include:

- Fat-free or low-fat cheese chunks and sliced apples
- Carrot sticks and plain yogurt (fat-free or low-fat)
- Chopped walnuts and fresh berries
- Whole grain crackers with low fat peanut butter and sliced banana on them
- Fat-free or low-fat 8 ounce milk and sliced pear
- Oranges and almonds

According to www.mypyramid.gov, a Web site for healthy food information, you can follow some of five tips below. Eating healthy each day is important for everyone.

- Educate yourself about healthy meals and snacks
- Read labels
- Pre-plan meals and snacks when you and your family are on the go
- Be a good role model for children and adults
- Balance healthy eating with exercise (Be sure check with your medical professional before you begin an exercise program).

Choosing a good plan for you and your Family can lead you to a "Healthier Tomorrow".

This column was written by Adam Shisgal, Nursing Student at the School of Nursing at the University of Pittsburgh. For more information on this article, please call 412-624-3217.

CHA is a part of the Department of Epidemiology in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States funded by the Centers for Disease Control. For questions or more information contact David J. Fetterman, Community Outreach Coordinator at the Center for Healthy Aging at 412-383-3121 or visit www.healthyaging.pitt.edu.