

# Tips for Conquering the **AFTER-SCHOOL** **SNACK ATTACK**

by Sarah Muntel, RD

**" Children need snacks to stay to stay full and energized, and it's important to offer a variety of foods for optimal nutrition. "**

After a long day at school, your child walks in the door feeling hungry, tired and... let's face it, a little cranky. They have spent the day learning information and being active, and lunch might have been hours ago. It's time to refuel! But think twice before opening up a box of packaged cookies or bringing out a pitcher filled with a sugary beverage.

After-school snacks can be an excellent chance to fuel your child's body with healthy, nutritious foods. Children need snacks to stay full and energized, and it's important to offer a variety of foods for optimal nutrition. They eat differently than adults. Children may eat a lot more often or even not a lot at once. They can also be picky, which can make planning a balanced diet challenging! After-school snacks can fuel children before an evening soccer practice, help them focus on homework and provide them with the nutrients they need to make it through the rest of the day.



## WHAT KINDS OF SNACKS WORK?

The sky is the limit when it comes to after-school snacks for your children! The key is to find something they like and get them involved with a hands-on activity as a bonus.

- **Ask for Preferences** – First, try asking your children what they would like. Don't worry, they will tell you! Take a minute to ask them about their favorite fruit, veggie or type of cheese. Then look for snacks that incorporate those foods. If they say they enjoy apples, think beyond whole apples. Consider apple quesadillas, apples with cinnamon or apple muffins.
- **Find Substitutions** – Okay. So if your child asks for a strawberry milkshake, look for an alternative solution. How about a strawberry smoothie made with yogurt? It's not exactly the same, but it's a close second. This can be a challenge, but it's worth it!
- **Foster Activity** – Allow your children to get involved. If they help prepare foods, they will be more likely to choose those foods. Get them involved in chopping, mixing or even picking produce from your garden outside. This may take a little longer in the kitchen, but it's a great way for them to get engaged with the process.

## WHAT MAKES A SNACK HEALTHY?

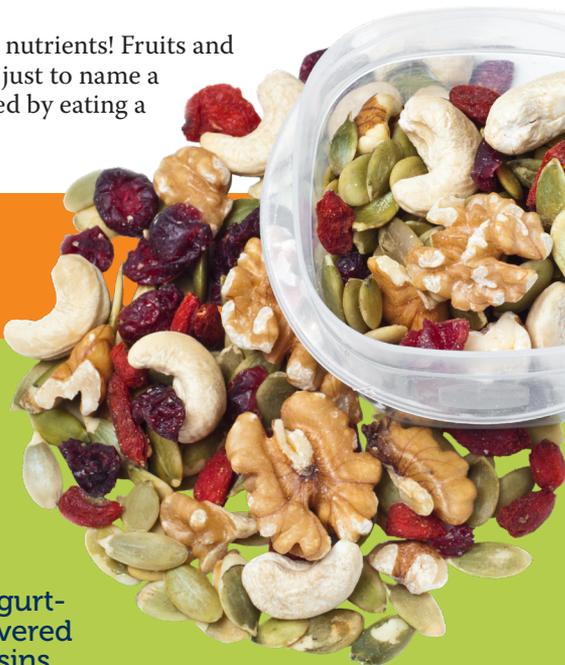
There is no such thing as a perfect after-school snack, but here are a few healthy tips:

- **Aim for Whole Foods** – Avoid foods like processed chips and cookies. Examples of whole foods include an apple with a spoonful of peanut butter, string cheese, an orange or a handful of nuts. These foods provide protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals. They also help to keep kids feeling full and energized. You don't get the same benefits with processed foods!
- **Check for Protein** – Dairy, nuts or lean meats can be a great addition to snack choices. Protein helps us feel full for longer periods of time and maintains our body's lean muscle mass. It's also a great way to round-out almost any snack option!
- **Add a Fruit or Veggie** – Hello nutrients! Fruits and veggies offer vitamins C, A and K, just to name a few. These vitamins can be obtained by eating a good variety of produce options.

## TRAIL MIX - A GREAT CHILD ACTIVITY!

Sometimes you don't need a recipe. You can make things up as you go, and trail mix is a great place to start! Go ahead and let your child be in control as they make their own trail mix. Pick several of the items below, get out your measuring cups and spoons and get started!

- Oat cereal
- Raisins
- Dried cranberries
- Walnuts
- Peanuts
- Sunflower seeds
- Mini chocolate chips
- Yogurt-covered raisins
- Dried bananas
- Granola
- Almonds
- Corn cereal
- Pumpkin seeds
- Shredded coconut
- Mini wheats



## BANANA BITES

### For a Cool and Fruity Treat!

Source: [Kidstir.com](http://Kidstir.com)

#### Ingredients:

- 2 bananas
- 2 tablespoons honey, yogurt or seed/nut butter
- ½ cup crunch toppings (*apple chips, corn/bran flakes or graham crackers*)
- ½ cup granola, rice cereal or puffed wheat

#### Directions:

1. Peel banana and lay it flat on a plate or cutting board.
2. Use a plastic or butter knife to spread a thin coat of seed/nut butter, honey or yogurt on the sides of each banana.
3. Get your toppings ready. Use a rolling pin to crush them. Poor the crumbs on a plate and on a separate plate, place the granola or other cereal.
4. Sprinkle a topping over each banana while turning the fruit until it's coated on all sides. Gently press the topping with your fingers so it sticks to the seed/nut butter and won't fall off.
5. Cut the bananas into bite-size pieces (*about 1-2 inches*). Trim the ends flat and stand them upright. Eat with a fork or add a Popsicle stick.



## OFFERING HEALTHY OPTIONS

Grab your children because it's time to get them involved with their nutrition! Instead of telling your child what you are giving them for a snack, involve them in the choosing process. Give them a choice between two healthy options and see what happens. Post a snack list in your kitchen and let them choose their own preferred snack. Below is a short list of suggestions, but feel free to take an additional minute and add a few of your own:

1. Make a snack list and hang it on your refrigerator.
2. Let your child choose what healthy snack they are in the mood for.
3. Be flexible with snacking options and your child's preferences.

I've also included a short snack list to get you started and inspire some additional healthy ideas:

- *A banana paired with nut butter*
- *An apple paired with cheese cubes*
- *Whole-grain crackers with avocado*
- *Turkey and cheese on pretzel thins*
- *Fruit and yogurt smoothie*
- *Whole-grain cereal with milk*
- *Yogurt and berries*
- *Red bell peppers or snacking peppers with hummus*
- *Cucumbers and turkey*



## PUMPKIN PIE SMOOTHIE

### Bring on the Fall Flavors!

Source: [Shugarysweets.com](http://Shugarysweets.com)

#### Ingredients:

- ½ cup pure pumpkin puree
- 1 large banana
- 6-8 ice cubes
- 6 oz. vanilla yogurt
- ½ teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- 1 teaspoon agave nectar
- 3 tablespoons milk
- Pinch of nutmeg

#### Directions:

1. In a blender, combine pumpkin, banana, ice, yogurt, spice, agave nectar and milk. Pulse until smooth.
2. Pour into a glass and enjoy!



## GETTING YOUR CHILDREN INVOLVED IN THE KITCHEN

If children are in the kitchen preparing foods and/or cooking, they are more likely to eat the snacks they helped make. Instill a love for cooking early on! Children who cook become adults who cook. Adults who cook can make lifelong healthy, delicious options. Incorporating this habit early on is important, and there are many different ways to achieve this.

First, teach your child basic kitchen skills such as chopping, measuring items for recipes and even baking. Did you know that cooking tools made specifically for kids are available at many stores? Here are a few store examples with great items for children:

- [CuriousChef.com](http://CuriousChef.com)
- [Williams-Sanoma.com](http://Williams-Sanoma.com)
- [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com)

You can also find child-friendly snack recipes and have your children prepare a few healthy options all by themselves. The key to having your children cook is to find recipes with minimal ingredients and minimal steps. As they get better, increase the complexity. See some recipes in this article for a few examples.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR KIDS TO GET INVOLVED?

Learning about nutrition early on can make a world of difference. Teaching nutrition as a healthy habit can instill a lifelong lifestyle of making healthy food choices. Healthy kids make healthy adults!

- **Instill a Love for Cooking** – Keep children wanting more. Try a new recipe each week and your child will catch-on fast. Don't expect miracles. There will be some things children don't like and others they will love. Just keep trying!
- **Teach the Impact** – Many times, we tell our children to eat healthy and make good choices. This can mean very little to kids unless you explain things on their level. For example, you can say something like: "Did you know that if you eat a whole-grain bagel with turkey before soccer practice, you will have more energy?" or "Water is important, so when you are playing outside, stay hydrated so that you can keep on playing with ease."

- **Make Things Fun** – Don't make cooking a chore. Find ways to keep your child's interest! Plan a specific after-school snack for a friend or bring healthy snacks to the school basketball team. They will be up for the fun challenge of helping themselves and others!

At the end of the day, remember that small changes can make a significant impact on long-term health. Sneaking in a healthy option every now and then can be a great way to turn the tide to health, just one simple after-school snack at a time!

### **About the Author:**

*Sarah Muntel, RD, is a Registered Dietitian from Indianapolis, IN. She has worked in the field of bariatrics for the past 18 years, working with both bariatric and metabolic surgery patients as well as medical weight-loss patients. Throughout her career, Sarah has worked in several bariatric centers in Indianapolis. She is currently the Bariatric Coordinator with Community Health Network. Sarah is an active member of the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), serves on the OAC Education Committee and frequently contributes to Your Weight Matters Magazine and Blog. She also plays an active role in the Indiana State Chapter of the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS). In her free time, Sarah enjoys spending time with her husband and watching her three kids play sports.*



# ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

## LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

### Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
  - Community Discussion Forum
  - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



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