

Weekly Column – Donna Krug, District Director and Family & Consumer Science Agent – Cottonwood Extension District

### Healthy Snacking Ideas

Since families are spending more time at home there is a good chance the food bill is on the rise. If you are noticing that many of the items being purchased are being consumed as between-meal-snacks, you will want to keep reading for some healthier, low-cost alternatives.

Whenever I visit with young families about snacking I like to remind them that young children have a smaller stomach than an older child or adult. There is a good reason they are hungry between meals. My advice is that “Snacking is fine – Just make sure it is a healthy snack.”

So what types of food constitute a healthy snack? Basically any fresh fruit or vegetable can provide a wide array of nutrients and an added bonus of fiber to give a feeling of fullness. Fruits and vegetables have been touted as nature's fast food, because often times you just have to wash, peel and enjoy! If fresh produce isn't available, look for frozen fruits and vegetables. Canned items can work too, but be aware they may have added salt and sugar, so look for fruit packed in water or fruit juice.

Grains, especially whole grains, provide energy and fiber for your growing family. Look for cereals where the sugar content is below 7 grams per serving. Avoid choosing cereals that list sugar as the first ingredient. Preparing your own snack mix with a whole grain cereal, nuts, seeds, and dried fruit can be less expensive and a healthier alternative than the highly processed prepared snacks.

A popular snack, Peanut Butter Balls, is easy to make and combines two food groups: grains and protein. If you have someone in your family with a peanut allergy you may substitute sunbutter, which is made from sunflower seeds. The recipe for Peanut Butter Balls follows:

- 1 can (15 ounces) great northern beans, drained and rinsed
- 2 tablespoons liquid sweetener of choice, (honey, maple syrup, brown rice syrup or agave)
- 1 tablespoon vanilla
- 1 ¼ cups peanut butter or other nut butter
- 1 ½ cups quick cooking oats

Directions: Wash hands with warm water and soap. Mash the beans with a fork in a bowl until smooth. Add the sweetener and vanilla and stir. Add peanut butter. Stir until blended. Stir in the oatmeal. Shape the mixture into balls. (makes about 50 balls) Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

You can use a blender or food processor to mix ingredients before shaping into balls. You can store peanut butter balls in the freezer. Lay them out on a cookie sheet and freeze. Then store in a freezer bag. Thaw for 5 minutes before serving.

Involve your kids in the planning and preparation of their healthy snack. This time spent together will provide some special memories. I have a handout titled, Snack Strategies For Kids, that I am happy to share if you send me an e-mail.

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