

smart K

a KID-PLEASING SOLUTIONS FOR THE DAY'S TOUGHEST "MEAL"

By Ellie Krieger, RD, MS

as a dietitian and mother of a preschooler, I have the inside scoop when it comes to feeding the 4-and-under set. I'm privy to the talk at school pick-up time and I see what's being served at the playground. Fellow parents ask for my take on all sorts of food issues, but the one that comes up most often is snacking. After conversations with concerned parents, I homed in on some of the more common problems and real-life solutions.

My kids snack all day and aren't hungry for dinner.

Eating between meals is important for small children because their little stomachs can't hold enough food to meet their needs with only three square meals. But that doesn't mean they should be grazing constantly. "When people think of

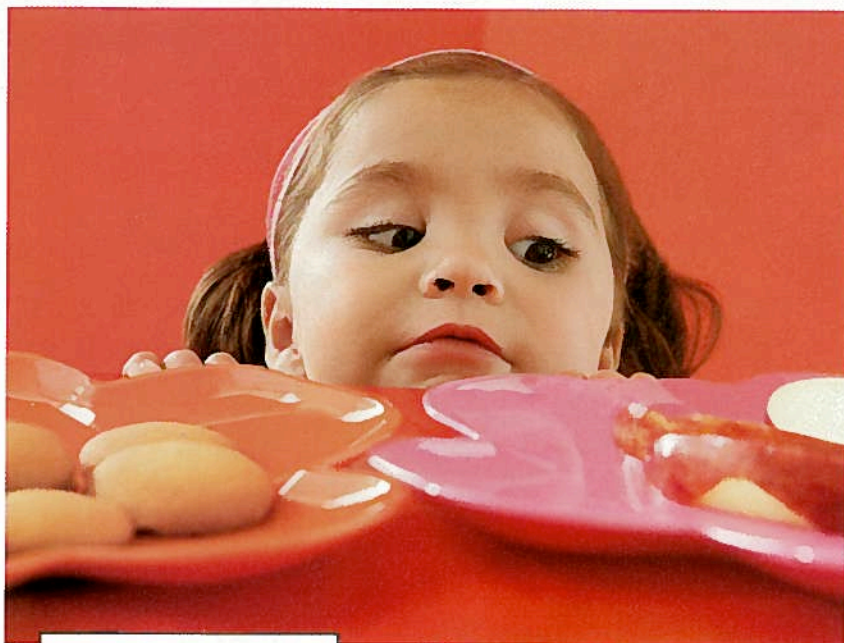
snacking, they think of random eating, but there should be a predictable, structured snack pattern," says Sandra Hassink, MD, editor of the American Academy of Pediatrics' book *A Parent's Guide to Childhood Obesity* (IPG, 2006).

If your child is used to snacking on demand, reining her in to a regular pattern (ideally one snack midmorning, one midafternoon) will be an adjustment for you both. One New York City mom, Liz, noticed that her daughter Lily, now 4, would ask for snacks when she was bored or seeking comfort. When Liz initially tried to limit Lily's snacking, Lily threw

Challenge your kids to eat veggies from all the colors of the rainbow.

MY CHILD DOESN'T EAT VEGETABLES AT SNACKTIME.

Sweet produce—like cut-up baby carrot: (large pieces can pose a choking hazard), chopped red peppers, and halved cherry tomatoes—make ideal snacks. Offer these as alternatives to other starchy fare. For instance, instead of peanut butter and crackers, tempt her with peanut butter and carrots. Children love to dip and will be happy to dunk their veggies in hummus or yogurt too. Whatever you do, don't pressure or force vegetables on your child. That will just draw the battle lines.



MY KIDS CONSTANTLY BEG TO SNACK ON SWEETS AND JUNK!

"Candy and sweets are part of life, but they should be a very small part," says Dr. Hassink. The USDA guidelines suggest limiting a preschooler's extra fat and sugar to 170 calories a day (about 17 large jelly beans, two cookies, or one ice cream cone). A 12-ounce soda or lemonade nears the daily calorie limit too.

Allowing sweets only at parties curtails intake. But if you keep candy at home, store it out of your child's reach. Serve an appropriate portion in a dish so she is not tempted to eat the whole box.

When it comes to breads, cereals, and crackers offer your child whole grains whenever possible

a fit. But, Liz found, "Once I got her involved in an activity, she forgot about wanting food."

Another way to ease into the new schedule: Instead of saying "no" when your child asks for a snack at the wrong time, tell him when he can eat again. This will help him understand that you aren't depriving him of food; he just has to wait a little while to eat.

Eventually your child will adapt to a regular snack schedule, and he'll be healthier for it: It can prevent overeating and help ensure better nutrition and will guarantee that he has an appetite at mealtime.

My kids eat horribly at friends' homes, and the snacks at school aren't ideal.

During the preschool years, you can take comfort in the fact that you are still the primary influence on your child's diet. So the occasional dinner of one bite of hot dog followed by an ice cream sundae at a friend's

home, or a whole jar of malt balls as a snack at Grandpa's, isn't going to erase the habits you create at home. But if your child spends a lot of time elsewhere and you're concerned about her snacks, it's worth addressing.

With friends and family, gently explain the snack rules you find best for your child and offer specific guidelines for which foods can be offered in what amount and when. Volunteer to pack snacks that your child can take to their home, and be careful not to come off as judgmental. If you think your child's preschool could use a snack makeover, "tell the classroom teacher your thoughts, and get a sense of how she feels about it," says Emily Shapiro, the director of Columbus Park West Nursery School, New York City—my daughter's preschool. "Offer ways that you can help implement changes gradually."

Organize a discussion at your child's school to see how parents and teachers feel about the snacks and brainstorm about how they can be improved. Although you may have different issues, you'll have a common goal: to offer your children the best nutrition.

Ellie Krieger, a registered dietitian, is the mother of 3-year-old Bella and the host of the Food Network's Healthy Appetite.

SNACK SWAPS

Instead of...	Better...	Best...
Full-fat cheese crackers	Reduced-fat cheese crackers	Reduced-fat cheese
Cookies	Graham crackers	Low-fat whole grain crackers
Orange-flavored punch	100% orange juice	Orange sections
Potato chips	Pretzels	Whole-wheat pretzels
Ice cream	"Kids" yogurt with candy pieces	Low-fat vanilla yogurt or plain with honey* or

**Do not give honey to children under*