

Best Food for Kids, Before and After School



When I was a grade-schooler my brother and I would walk home from school each day. He was one grade behind me. It was about a mile from school to the house. If we didn't get any other exercise at least we got that.

I do know that we went out to play after school but when we got home and dropped our books on the dining room table we had a snack routine that followed immediately after.

Most often I'd do my snacking in the kitchen. I'd go to the pantry and pick up a donut or other pastry my mother had gotten at the bakery. I'd wash that down with a big glass of milk while I watched TV. My shows of choice were to watch Julia Child whip up a dish or I'd watch Graham Kerr, (another famous chef), cook a meal. Little did I know that interest in cooking would carry on into adulthood and become so integral to my life. My brother had different tastes. He would grab a bag of potato chips and a 16 ounce Pepsi and he'd go off to the den to watch his favorite shows.

After that we went out to play with friends until dinner.

I never really worried about my weight until boys came into the picture. At 12 years old I became rather obsessed with diet and food. It didn't stop me from eating donuts. My overall tactics were to just eat less and less. The education at the time revolved around counting calories. I became really good at that. I bought one of those pocket calorie books they had by the cash register at the grocery store. I memorized it.

Now I know that calorie counting was a waste of time. What I needed was a low carb way of eating. I needed options and I needed to eat the right stuff.

So now when I think of what kids could be eating, potato chips and donuts assuredly don't hit the list. What I am going to do here is give you ideas for breakfast, lunch and after-school snacks. Your kids deserve tasty, healthy food.

Breakfast

Fruit: First off, don't give your kid a glass of juice. There's enough fructose in it to cause real problems. The nation's preeminent childhood obesity expert, Dr. Robert Lustig of UC San Francisco calls fructose "poison" and he backs up his claims with science. Mother Nature gave you the antidote to the fructose when she invented whole fruit. The antidote is the fiber. Little kids will love a clementine. They are small and peel easily. It will take a kid a lot longer to peel and eat a clementine than it does to down a glass of juice. It's deliciously sweet and has plenty of vitamin C in one dose.

Eggs: Hard boiled eggs are transportable if you have to rush your kids off to the bus. If they have time to sit and eat, any kind of eggs are good. Cook them any way they like. You can even make Breakfast Quiche Casseroles so you have more than one day of breakfast. They keep in your fridge easily.

Sausages and breakfast meats: There is no cereal that is going to keep a kid full and focused. Protein and fat will. Kids love to pick up a sausage link with their fingers. You can serve them any kind of meat, too. There are plenty of breakfast meats to choose from if they like bacon, Canadian bacon, or ham. But don't limit yourself to traditional breakfast meats. If your kid wants the leftover chicken from last night, give it to them. Steer clear of sausages packed with sugar. Quality control is important here. Read the label on the box, or better yet, buy them from the butcher. Stay away from processed food as much as possible.

Pancakes: Yep, there are healthy pancakes. When pancakes are made with almond flour they are healthy. You can smash berries and mix them with a bit of Truvia (instead of syrup), or spread them with unsweetened peanut butter. You can find good peanut butter in stores now. Steer away from peanut butter with high fructose corn syrup in it. Again, read the label.

Apples with peanut butter: Slice up an apple and give your kids access to the peanut butter jar. They can take out a big scoop and then dip their apple in it or spread it on the slices. It's plenty of protein to get them through the morning, and it's filling too.

Smoothies: Have a teenager who wants to run out the door? Hand them a smoothie in one of those 'go cups' usually reserved for coffee. It will stay cold. The secret is to use full fat Greek yogurt. Steer clear of the huge aisle of flavored yogurt that is all full of sugar. You can sweeten the shake with frozen fruit and Truvia. Just follow the recipe. Little kids love these, too. They think they are getting an ice cream treat. Play that up!

Lunch

Any of the transportable things above can work for lunch. Even the pancakes. They travel well. Who says you can't have breakfast for lunch? Brunch is good.

Meat rolls: You can go back to your butcher and ask for lunch meat that has been roasted in house. Steer clear of the stuff in the packages hanging on the wall. You want fresh, unprocessed lunch meat. Choose your kid's favorite slice. Then add a slice of cheese and their favorite spread (mayo, mustard, etc) and roll it up. You can add lettuce, cucumber sticks, you can even add a few pickle spears for fun. They look like little meat cigars. Kids have fun eating them. They transport well in the sealable lunch bags in batches. They can have a few of them. Who says they need bread? Skip it. They can eat their meat rolls with their fingers and have fun.

Salads: Any salad packed in a Tupperware-style container and put in an insulated bag will work.

High protein salads: Think chicken salad, tuna salad, egg salad, ham salad, etc. You can make them with or without mayo. Kids like the crunch of celery. You can add nuts, too. More protein and fat for an afternoon of focus.

Baby meatloaves: Kids love these. They can be eaten cold or reheated in the microwave.

Drinks: NO SODA. Not even diet. Steer clear. Find healthy options. La Croix, for example has come out with a whole line of naturally flavored sparkling waters. They have a ton of flavors. If you get your kid hooked on this stuff they won't get a sugar buzz. They won't get a caffeine buzz. They just get a sparkling experience that tastes amazingly like regular soda. Fun kid flavors, too.

This is just a start on the options for lunch.

After School Snacks

Everyone wants to give a kid a snack when they get home from school. One thing I'll start off saying is if the kids eat more protein at lunch they are not likely to be so ravenous when they get home, like they are when they eat carbohydrate-laden meals. Carbs don't really fill you up or do much to nourish you, so they wear off and leave you feeling hungry and unsatisfied.

Nuts: A great snack idea to replace chips of any kind. Here's a pecan mix that's actually sweet! Leave out the spicy bit if you want a straight sweet snack. If you feel the need to give them something sweet you can use some dried fruit bits. Just don't load it with fruit. The ratio can be more like 10:1 (10 nuts to one raisin or apricot bit).

Fruit: When you get your kids off of all the sugar you'll be amazed at how sweet fruit tastes. We are back to the clementine idea. Also plums, peaches and nectarines can be a sweet treat. Just feed them a whole piece of fruit and steer clear of the canned stuff with all the sugar. Berries are a sweet treat that is easy to eat. Steer clear of high glycemic index fruits like grapes, watermelon, pineapple and bananas. If you give them grapes give them one or two. They will taste like gumdrops but they don't need a whole bunch.

Candy: Yes you can come up with healthy candy. Just serve in moderation. I'm giving you two recipes. If you're a 'gourmet cook' or adventurous in the kitchen you'll love these. Frozen yogurt bark is fun to eat and super delicious.

My friend Chef Josh offers up this gelee recipe. That's French for gummie. These are all natural candy with no sugar. They

taste sweet nonetheless. Just get a candy mold at the craft or kitchen supply store and you're set.

Cheese: Kids can snack on cheese cubes. It won't take a lot of them to fill them up.

Sweet Treats: Investigate low carb baking. The regular white flour we are accustomed to is full of carbohydrates. There are other options. It just takes a little education on how to replace the gluten that holds baked goods together. My favorites so far are coconut flour and almond flour but there are even more options. Just get on the internet and start to learn. It's just like going back to home economics class. Fun.

Here's a simple recipe to get you started: 3 Ingredient Peanut Butter Cookies. They are oh so yummy.

If your kids want something cold you are in luck. You can make this. It can be made ahead and stored in the fridge for days. It's way better for you than commercial ice cream and has the same kind of decadent feeling in your mouth. You can use it at your next dinner party too! Adults love this stuff! Chocolate French Silk.

One last one: If you have a food processor you can always whip up a batch of what I call Smoosh. It's just like a frozen snow cone without the paper cone. Kids and adults both love this stuff. Some tell me they are never going back to ice cream after eating this stuff. They get the same satisfaction and no sugar.

I hope this sets you up for the school year. My goal is to see the lives of children changed by changing their eating habits and it starts with those of us who pay for the food.

Cheers,

Zola