

CHILDREN'S HEALTHY SNACK OPTIONS BY MARY JO KURTZ

The kids are back to school and the novelty has worn off for everyone! Packing snacks, lunches and doing homework is now just part of the routine. Many of us struggle with finding the healthiest options to feed our families. This is only complicated by our desire to not incite the typical "I'm not eating that!" or "There's nothing to eat in this house!" I know that most of you with children can relate to these words.

Most of you have seen the snack food labels "No Trans Fats" and are thinking "Well, these must be healthy..." The truth is - usually their not! Trans Fats are hydrogenated or partially-hydrogenated oils that have been altered. The reasons manufacturers use them are they are extremely inexpensive and their shelf life will last until the end of time! The downside for consumers is that they are unnatural and the body has no idea what to do with them when consumed. They are toxic and research has now linked them to many chronic health conditions. The biggest problem is that they are present in virtually all baked goods and junk food. So when we see labels that claim "No Trans Fats" look for the fine print under those words. Usually it says "per serving" and that means Trans Fats are still in the product. By law the label can say "No Trans Fats" if there is less than .5 grams per serving. So now by decreasing serving sizes and misleading labels, we are actually consuming much larger amounts and are completely unaware. Read your labels!

So - here are a few suggestions for creating your own healthier snacks at home. Be creative!

Veggies & Dips - cut up veggies and have a variety of dips. Some ideas are avocado/guacamole, hummus or salsa. All of these can be prepared at home without the preservatives and additives of commercial brands. Use organic extra-virgin olive oil to prepare.

Smoothies - these are a favorite in my house because it's easy to create the flavors that suit every taste. Use fresh fruits, nuts or nut butters like peanut, almond or cashew, along with juice or a dairy alternative like soy, almond, rice or hemp milk. For a sweetener you can add stevia or agave nectar to taste.

Wraps – Use whole grain tortillas with a variety of fillings. Choose caesar salad or other veggies with lean meats, tuna or shrimp. Use mustard, oil & vinegar or hummus for added flavor. Try preparing an extra serving or two of your dinner's protein, like chicken or shrimp to have on hand for the next day.

Mini Pizzas – Use whole grain tortillas or pita breads with tomato sauce. You can top with fresh or left-over veggies, organic mozzarella or a dairy alternative if desired.

Dried Fruits & Nuts/Seeds – buy raw and organic whenever possible. Pan roast nuts and/or seeds (oil optional) and add flavorings that your family will enjoy. Try agave nectar and cinnamon for a sweeter flavor or tamari, soy sauce, olive oil, lemon, pepper and other seasonings to suit your tastes. Also try a variety of nuts and seeds. For fall, try walnuts, pecans, almonds, cashews, flax, and pumpkin.

Fresh Fruit – in season varieties are best. For fall, try apples, pears, citrus, grapes (try frozen). You can use organic non-fat yogurt or nut butters for dipping.