

## SNACK ATTACK

Snack Food accounts for one-quarter of children's calories, so pervasive are these non-foods that moves are afoot in the United States, where February is their National Snack Food Month, to have snack food seen as a major food group.

Let me begin by saying there is nothing inherently unhealthy about snacking, the art of eating little and often, which can be the best way to meet children's nutritional needs.

In 1926 when potato chips first became widely available in grocery stores, obesity, now spreading with the speed of a communicable disease epidemic, was not widely seen.

Today, Laura Scudder's wax-paper lined brown paper bags of chips have now given way to irresistible fluorescent packaging containing adulterated refined non-foods full of sugar, hydrogenated fats, salt and chemicals.

Fluorescent packaged branded time-bombs are now delivered to our children through television, media, toys, celebrity presenters, schools and supermarkets by aggressive marketing and advertisers increasingly talking directly to children. As a society we would not think of advertising cigarettes, drugs or alcohol to children, yet our commercial culture preys on nutritionally inexperienced and ill-equipped children promoting products that not only cause long-term damage to health but also promote values that many parents do not approve of. It is time that parents led a campaign to take back their responsibility for instilling good healthy eating habits. No amount of parental control will override the brand name brain implants being delivered daily by clever psychological kid-targeted advertising. It is time we forced the food industry, this new intrusive "Nanny", to consider their Corporate Social Responsibilities as well as their role in rising food-related health problems and family conflict.

The only policies to protect your child from the imbalanced nutritional advertising messages are the ones you put in place yourself. The biochemical individuality of your child is dependent upon, not only the genetics, but also the state of the foetus' nutritional health and the toxic body burden during gestation. Everything that goes into the mother's body plays a part in overall health. Then, from the moment the child is born, tastes and addictions develop. Many nutrition and health problems begin now, "first-foods" are critical. So before your baby gets addicted to commercially prepared baby foods laced with sugars and salt, leading directly to fast-foods, begin with creativity and imagination to establish healthy eating patterns and nutritious food preferences. Food is so important, nutritionally, emotionally and socially, that parents can't abdicate their responsibility to processed food manufacturers who use of hundreds of artificial flavours, colours, additives and sweeteners to make children think they are eating something good.

It is a sad state of affairs when parents are locked in a constant battle trying to keep the commercial junk-food culture out of their children's lives. The key to winning this war is to remember that the child's intellectual and emotional development depends upon interaction with adults. Parents, if they wish, can have a major role in shaping eating habits, and there are many ways to interact with your toddlers to make organic food fun! Begin by looking to France where cooking is an art not a chore. Here children become familiar with fine food from an early age, and meal times are family occasions where the focus is on quality and freshness, NOT quantity.

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It is never too late to begin the process of taking greater control of your family's health, but like a toddler learning to walk, small steps are best.

1. Begin by looking at your own eating habits and preferences. Examine the pantry shelves, read the labels, audit the packaged, processed and prepared foods. Do some research to see if the flour you are using can support life! Put some refined white flour in an open glass jar and leave for a month, do weevils invade? Buy some organic whole wheat flour and try the same experiment.
2. Consider your "diet". How much food do you prepare from scratch for your children? Can you make muffins, pizzas, oatmeal cookies, fresh fruit crumbles, vegetable soups, simple mince dishes, fruit salads, yoghurt or bread? Make sure the snacks you prepare are nutrient dense high quality foods.
3. Introduce water as the main thirst quencher, it is a primary anti-oxidant.
4. Grow herbs like red sage, pineapple sage, lemon verbena and peppermint along with lemon or lemonade or orange trees to make herb teas and herb flavoured drinks.
5. Grow some of your own organic vegetables. Cherry tomatoes, snap peas, beans, broccoli, alpine strawberries and carrots can be fresh picked and are real winners. Quick growing varieties of lettuce make the basis for garden fresh salads.

Children, like adults, just want their food to taste good, have visual appeal and satisfy hunger. Children live in a world of imagination where any object can take any form they please and they see whatever they wish. Tickling children's taste buds and making food fun is limited only to parent's creativity. Introduce Goodies for Goblins, Dishes for Dinosaurs, Treats for Taniwhas, Victuals for Vipers even Menus for Monsters.

Science and well-being meet in the kitchen, so let your children and their friends help you cook. Not only are children constantly hungry, they are also hungry to learn, and the kitchen environment with its diverse range of "toys" is just the place to get back to food basics and teach "food science".

#### Creative Ideas to Involve Children:

1. Be famous chefs, give yourselves names and "brand" your own creations.
2. Introduce new words-- gastronome, victuals, gluttons, banquet, menu, mastication, feast, ragout, potage, repast, snack, quaff, nibble, and potluck. With a little searching you can have an alphabet of words for children to feast upon.
3. Have sandwich making contests with children. Arrange old favourites as well as introducing new foods and let children experiment with new combinations. Tuna and apple, almond or cashew butter and bananas, sprouted seeds and cheese.
4. Munchies—banana chips, raisins, nuts, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, dried apples.

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5. Make finger food using a whole range of fruits and vegetables fresh out of the garden and cut small. Use a riot of colours to make fruit and vegetable rainbows. Try cutting apples and dipping in lemon juice and rolling in sesame seeds or coconut. For the pot of gold make dips using chick peas, avocados, yoghurt and salsas.
6. Make canapés using rye and pumpnickel with sardines, herrings. Try any completely new food which will supply Omega 3.
7. Make pancakes using potatoes or buckwheat flour. Use the pancakes to make portraits. Add bacon for lips, berry eyes, kiwifruit ears. Shred pumpkin flowers or day lily flowers for hair. Add a little honey if necessary.
8. Use pancakes for a mini universe. Moon pancakes cut to the shape of the moon, fruit, or cherry tomatoes or berry planets, yoghurt clouds and fruit or vegetables cut to shape for stars.
9. Plan special garden picnics using a lunchbox; make meatballs, oatmeal cookies, granola Energy Bars.
10. Experiment with fruit or tomato salsas. The subtle, additive free flavours will convince children that whole foods are delicious.
11. Make potato chips, using garden fresh potatoes. Let children cut fat chips, roll in olive oil, salt, herbs and grill until sizzling and golden.

## 10 STEPS TO RETRAIN TASTEBUDS

1. Eliminate the use of hydrogenated fats including margarine. Use butter and cold pressed oils.
2. Restrict sugar intake. Use maple syrup, honey, molasses or fruit juice for cooking.
3. Go Organic. Avoid the health risks associated with agriculture—the use of antibiotics and pesticides.
4. Increase intake of high fibre foods—whole grains, nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables.
5. Avoid overcooking. Eat lots of raw foods and lightly steam or sauté vegetables.
6. Replace refined grains with whole grains. Use brown rice. Choose whole grain cereals and breads. Use a variety of flours, spelt, barley, cornmeal, and buckwheat.
7. Eat a wide variety of whole foods — legumes, beans, fresh fruits and vegetables, and cultured yoghurt.
8. Avoid all refined foods and processed foods that contain artificial ingredients.
9. Include naturally fermented foods. Make your own yoghurt. Try buttermilk and use miso in sauces and stews, but add just before serving.
10. Try sea vegetables. Use kelp powder. Try nori and make sushi.



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