

Healthy morning snack, lunch, and afternoon snack Guide for Daycare Families

Providing healthy snacks is essential for supporting growth, brain development, and energy throughout the day. This guide offers nutritious morning snack, lunch, and afternoon snack ideas for children from 12 months to 24 months, ensuring age-appropriate, safe, and balanced options.

Brain Development

During the first five years, a child's brain develops faster than at any other time in life. Nutrients like iron, omega-3 fatty acids, protein, and vitamins A, D, and B12 support brain growth, memory, and attention. Malnutrition or poor eating habits can lead to slower cognitive development and difficulty focusing or learning.

Physical Growth and Strength

Proper nutrition provides the energy and building blocks for bone, muscle, and organ development. Foods rich in calcium, vitamin D, and protein help children grow taller, stronger, and healthier. Balanced meals prevent obesity, underweight, and other health concerns that can affect participation in play and learning.

Immune System and Overall, Health

Healthy foods strengthen the immune system, reducing illnesses that cause absences from school or daycare. Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains supply essential vitamins and antioxidants that protect the body from infections.

Healthy Habits and Relationship with Food

Early exposure to a variety of healthy foods helps children develop good eating habits for life. When caregivers model and encourage nutritious choices, children learn to enjoy fruits, vegetables, and balanced meals instead of processed or sugary foods.

Behavior and Emotional Regulation

Consistent nutrition helps stabilize energy levels and mood throughout the day. Skipping meals or eating high-sugar foods can cause irritability, tiredness, or difficulty following routines in the classroom.

School Readiness and Learning Success

A well-nourished child is more likely to concentrate, participate, and learn effectively in early learning environments. Teachers can observe stronger language, social, and problem-solving skills when children have consistent access to nutritious meals and snacks.

Tip: Always cut food into vertical, manageable pieces and supervise eating to prevent choking.

👶 12–24 months (Toddlers)

Introduce small pieces they can hold, encouraging independence and fine motor skills.

Example of morning snack:

- Soft fruit pieces (banana, strawberries, blueberries, melon)
- Mini whole-wheat pancakes or waffles (plain or with fruit purée)
- Whole-grain crackers with cheese or hummus
- Yogurt with blended fruit
- Boiled egg pieces
- Oatmeal muffins (low sugar)

👶 12–24 Months (Toddlers)

Children are learning to self-feed; offer soft, bite-sized pieces that are safe and easy to grasp.

Examples for lunch:

- Shredded chicken + soft rice + steamed broccoli + soft diced peaches
- Ground turkey meatballs + small pasta + cooked carrots + banana slices
- Baked salmon flake + mashed potatoes + peas + applesauce
- Scrambled eggs + whole wheat toast + spinach + watermelon cubes

Tip: Offer finger foods that encourage independence and coordination

👶 12–24 Months (Toddlers)

Toddlers are learning to self-feed, so offer finger foods that support fine motor skills.

Examples for afternoon snack:

- Cheese cubes or string cheese
- Soft fruits (berries cut in half, bananas, peaches, kiwi)
- Mini whole wheat pancakes or toast strips with mashed fruit
- Yogurt with small fruit pieces
- Whole grain crackers with hummus or avocado spread
- Boiled eggs (cut in quarters)
- Oatmeal mini bites or muffins made with fruit and little sugar

💧 **Healthy Drink Options**

- Water (best choice throughout the day)
- Milk (whole milk up to age 2; low-fat or 1% for 2+ years)
- Smoothies made with fruit and milk or yogurt

Avoid: juices with added sugar, soda, or sports drinks.

❤️ **General Tips for Parents**

- Include one fruit or vegetable with every snack.
- Avoid foods that are choking hazards (whole grapes, nuts, popcorn, hard candy, raw carrots) for younger children.
- Choose minimally processed foods with low sugar and salt.
- Encourage children to eat slowly and mindfully.