

SCHOOL SNACKS

A second *Parenting Tips* focusing on nutritious foods for school.

Snacks are just as important as main meals to keep children going — the key is to provide ones that are **nutritious** as well as **tasty** and **appealing**. While the taste side of it can be left up to the kids, the nutrition factor is harder to judge. And with the masses of **convenient** lunchbox snacks on the market — and the associated **pestering** from your kids to have the **latest fad**: a cheese ‘dipper’ or a fruit ‘strap’, perhaps — it’s easy to lose track of **what’s good** and **what’s not**.

We looked at around **100 snacks** to see how they measured up, and found **25** that **met all our nutrition criteria** (see the table for details). Here’s how we decided which snacks* are suitable to eat more often, and those that are best kept as treats:

Energy

Kids need energy from food to last through the day, and ideally a snack will provide enough energy to keep them going and be nutritious as well. However, too much energy combined with not enough exercise can lead to excessive weight gain.



- We looked for lunchbox snacks with less than 600 kilojoules per serve — about the equivalent of a banana.
- Some snacks, particularly biscuits and chips, only meet our energy criteria because they’re small servings, so don’t be tempted to put more than one in.

Saturated fat

Too much saturated fat in the diet is associated with an increase in coronary heart disease, and even kids need to limit the amount they eat. Fatty snacks are also energy-dense and so can contribute to weight gain.

- Watch out for biscuits — some, like BISC & BISCUITS Milky Way and PARADISE Kidz Choc Pinkies, contain more saturated fat than chips.
- A lot of **muesli and cereal bars** are stuck together with fats and sugars, so pick carefully.
- Many of the **cheese snacks** have too much saturated fat to meet our lunchbox snack criteria. But some are OK and they can also provide valuable nutrients like calcium and protein. For a good source of **calcium**, check the labels for ones with at least 100 mg calcium per 100 g.

Sugar

Foods high in added sugar often have minimal nutritional value, so don't make very good everyday lunchbox snacks. And if they stick to kids' teeth they can encourage decay, so are best avoided.

- **Lollies** are the worst, but fruit straps can be particularly sticky, and **fruit bars** in general were the most sugary snacks we looked at. The majority were around 65–75% sugar — that's about three teaspoons (15 g) of sugar in each little 20 g bar. While fruit sugars contribute to this total, most are only around 25% fruit; added sugar makes up the bulk.

Sodium

Too much sodium (generally from salt) is associated with raised blood pressure, which increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. So it's important not to have too much, whatever your age.

- Snack combinations of **biscuits** with **dip or spread** are often very salty. ARNOTT'S Shapes Big Dippers Tasty Cheddar, for example, contains close to a quarter of the maximum recommended daily intake of sodium for 8–15-year-olds in a single 55 g serve.
- **Chips** can be high in sodium too, so check the labels before you buy.

To get a better idea of the nutrition impact of different snacks on a kid's daily diet, we took a look at the lunchboxes of two active 10-year-olds, Jackson and Daniel. On an average day, they look like this:

	Jackson	Daniel	Max. recommended for whole day (age 10)
Food in lunchbox	Juice drink	Water	
	Cheese sandwich	Egg sandwich	
	Apple	Banana	
	Chips	Popcorn	
	Cheese dipper	Fruit yoghurt	
	Fruit bar	Muesli bar	
Energy (KJ)	3242	2523	9000
Saturated fat (g)	16	8	25
Sugar (g)	64	39	110
Sodium (mg)	1002	539	2300

On the surface they both look healthy enough, but Jackson's lunchbox could be improved by making just a few small changes:

- The sweetened juice drink and fruit bar combined mean that Jackson's lunchbox has almost double the sugar of Daniel's, which isn't great for his teeth. Changing the drink to water and only providing a fruit bar occasionally would make a difference.
- The cheese sandwich, chips and cheese dipper in Jackson's lunchbox together contribute a lot of sodium, and double the saturated fat, of Daniel's lunchbox. Switching the dipper for yoghurt, for example, would keep the calcium but cut back on the salt and sat fat. Swapping the chips for popcorn would also help, and provide more fibre at the same time.
- Both boys could benefit from having their sandwich fillings varied, perhaps including salads and lean meats or dips like hummus, as an alternative source of protein.
- Try our [interactive lunchbox](#), to see how different snacks can contribute to your diet.

Source: www.choice.com.au

See *Choice* website and February *Parenting Tips* for further information about nutrition.