

Snack SMART

Forget three square meals a day, from the age of nine months your baby needs to fill his tummy regularly to stay happy and healthy



MEET THE EXPERT

Sarah West is a specialist in infant nutrition. She works with a top nursery provider, devising healthy menus for children, sarahwestnutrition.co.uk

We all know that snacking is probably the reason why our jeans are always just a little bit too tight, so when we resolve to be healthy, snacks are often the first things to go. It's easy to assume the same rules about what makes a healthy diet goes for our babies, but we would be wrong!

Once your baby is making the exciting transition from milk to solids, and starts to rely on food to fill his tummy, snacks become an integral part of the feeding puzzle. Your child grows and develops at an incredible rate. He'll go from crawling to walking, from babbling to talking and, by the time he's three, he'll weigh over four times his birth weight. And snacks will help you deliver the broad spectrum of nutrients he needs to maintain well-being and sustain energy levels through this demanding period.

'Around the age of nine months, your baby will start to benefit from a morning and afternoon snack,' says nutritionist Sarah West. 'By this time, he'll be having around one pint of milk a day, and his solid food should be split into three small meals and two snacks to ensure a steady stream of nutrients.' Start simple, introducing any new foods one by one: 'Plain yoghurt or fruit is an ideal



TRY THESE!

Add crushed blueberries to pancake batter for a delicious purple treat.

Freeze a pot of apple purée for an hour and mix to make the ultimate slushy.

snack food at nine months,' advises Sarah, 'but move on to more adventurous foods like carrot and cucumber sticks or crunchy oat bars, along with the introduction of cow's milk, by 12 months.' Use the snacking as an opportunity to introduce him to lots of new tastes, as this will widen the range of what he's happy to eat and fill any nutritional gaps in his diet, and help his body deal with many different types of food.

This little and often approach to eating is key, because the rate at which food is burned for energy in your baby's body is very different to yours. Physical growth of muscle, tissue and bone means he requires a calorie-dense diet. At nine months he'll need between 700 and 900 calories per day. From his first birthday until three years of age, his daily calorie needs increase to 1,000 to 1,200 as he'll be more active. And if he's having a growth spurt he'll have an even higher energy requirement. But he still has a very small digestive system, so eating large portions can put a strain on his tummy. 'Calorie intake should be well spaced out throughout the day,' says Sarah. 'Simply divide his recommended intake by five to discover how much he should be eating at each meal or snack.' So the recommended 1,000 daily calorie intake for a two-year-old

5 SPEEDY, SMART SNACKS SHE'LL LOVE

1 KALE CRISPS
Wash 50g kale, pat dry with kitchen towel, and place on a baking tray lined with parchment. Lightly coat in 1 tbsp olive oil and place in an oven at 400°F/200°C, gas mark 6 for 15 minutes, or until the leaves turn crispy.

2 YUMMY BERRY SMOOTHIE
Place 10g full-fat Greek yoghurt, 2 tbsp frozen mixed berries, quarter of a banana, one slice of avocado, 60ml coconut water and a pinch of cinnamon in a blender and blitz until smooth.

3 RAINBOW SKEWERS
Place 6 cherry tomatoes

(halved), half each of a yellow pepper (cubed), courgette (cut into ½ inch slices) and a sweet potato (cubed) on a baking tray lined with parchment. Lightly toss in 1 tbsp olive oil and place in a preheated oven at 350°F/180°C, gas mark 4 for around 20 minutes or until roasted. Push the veggies onto lolly sticks and serve with 1 tbsp full-fat Greek yoghurt.

4 ENERGY BALLS
Place 50g cashew nuts in a food processor and pulse until ground. Add 35g raisins, 1 tbsp peanut butter, 1 tsp flaxseed and 1 tsp cocoa powder. Blitz until smooth. Shape into four small balls



and roll in 25g coconut. Chill before serving.

5 SAVVY PUD
Place 25g chia seeds in a bowl. Add a pinch of cinnamon and 100ml milk, and stir well. Leave to soak for 30 minutes until the

texture has thickened. Purée half a mango and cut two strawberries into small pieces. Spoon the chia seed mix into a bowl, put a dollop of mango on top, followed by a scatter of strawberries. Makes 3 portions.

FEELING PECKISH?



send them crashing again. And this fluctuation can have a negative effect on his behaviour. Help him to snack well, and you'll limit hunger-led meltdowns.

With these benefits in mind, put as much thought into his snacks as you do his meals. This way he (and you!) will get the maximum benefit from these bite-sized mini-meals. 'Each day, aim to give your child five portions of starch, three dairy, two protein and five fruit and veg,' says Sarah. 'Getting all that into three toddler-sized meals is difficult, but use his snacks and you'll easily meet the target. Leave a decent gap between snacks and meals – around two hours is sufficient – so schedule a mid-morning snack at around 10am and an afternoon snack at around 2pm. Fruit is digested quickly so that's a good option mid-morning, as babies tend to lunch early, but this means she'll still be hungry again by noon. It's also a useful choice if it's half an hour until a mealtime but you feel your child could benefit from a snack. Dairy-based snacks take longer to digest, so give her one in the afternoon to keep her full until teatime.'

When it comes to snacking, think healthy from the get-go. 'The important thing is to keep sugar to a minimum,' says Sarah. There's lots of research that shows that the foods children are exposed to early on shape eating habits in adulthood, and can help to prevent weight-related conditions like type 2 diabetes and obesity, so it's really worth making the effort to snack smart at this early stage. And there are loads of easy, fun ways to incorporate healthy foods into her grazing, from delicious smoothies that cram in the fruits and veggies, to home-made dips that jazz up oatcakes *and* add nutritional value. Tasty and wholesome is the way to go!

should be split into about 200 calories for each meal or snack.

'Drip-feeding in this way will also keep his blood glucose levels steady, which fuels both his body and brain,' explains Sarah. When levels fall, energy dips, and this could prompt cravings for sugary treats like sweets or biscuits to get a quick fix. Eating sugar will temporarily raise his blood glucose levels, but will then

TRY THIS!

Use a cookie cutter to create a fun shape out of toast, then spread with nut butter.

CLEVER GADGETS FOR FUN NIBBLES

Home-made smoothies and purées are far more appealing if they're in a pouch. Make your own with the Fill n Squeeze Baby Weaning Pouch System, which includes a masher and jug. £19.99, fillsqueeze.co.uk



Made for little hands, the clever Vital Baby Trap-a-Snack containers are ergonomically designed so your toddler can carry her own nibbles and not spill a crumb. £3.99 each, vitalbaby.co.uk

Make milk fun for your toddler with this Moo Moo Milk Mix Milkshake Maker & Straw. Use your child's favourite fruit purée to flavour cow's milk and create a frothy treat. £4.87, lakeland.co.uk



These Flat Stacks lunch boxes feature two compartments – she'll eat far more if there's a choice of two tasty snacks. They fold down when empty too, saving you space in your baby bag, £20 for two, wowzr.co.uk

With five different cutting options, the Twinzee 5-in-1 Compact Food Slicer slices and shreds fruit and veg to help your child get her five-a-day: in your toddler's world, if it's a different shape, it's a different food! £35, amazon.co.uk

