

12 Best Snacks to Pack

By Susan Mudd, C.N.S., L.D.

Low carb, nutritious snacks are crucial for kids with diabetes and unfortunately much of what's out there is quite the opposite. Even for kids without diabetes, managing blood sugar from an early age can go a long way towards preventing high insulin levels and diabetes later on in life. But eating healthy and sticking to a low-glycemic diet can be very tricky with kids. The key is to find nutritious snacks that will appeal to those picky palates that are tempted daily by a barrage of sugary and empty calories. So think protein, fiber, and healthy fats — you'll help set them up for a lifetime of good health.

1. HARD-BOILED EGG

No doubt about it: The incredible edible is the number-one protein packed superfood snack, loaded with healthy fats and an array of vitamins and minerals (but don't tell the kids). Eggs provide the highest-quality protein found in any food, delivering every one of the essential amino acids in the right proportion. And don't chuck the yolk: It provides most of an egg's vitamins and almost half of its protein. It's also one of the only foods that naturally contains vitamin D. Look for varieties with higher amounts of omega-3s, and consider organic and cage-free for added nutrition.

CARBS: 0g (6.3g protein, 100mg omega-3s in Egghand's Best)

Note: If you want to tell whether an egg is raw or hard-boiled, give it a spin. Raw eggs will wobble, while hard ones will spin like a top.

2. CHEESE STICKS

Whether it's straight mozzarella string cheese or the cheddar-mozzarella twists, cheese sticks are a no-carb favorite among kids. They pack 6 grams of protein and are a good source of calcium. Easy to pack and fun to "untwist," cheese sticks can give kids a lasting energy boost with no blood sugar spikes.

CARBS: 0g (6g of protein) in Polly-O(R) String Cheese

Note: Other great packables are the cute, Laughing Cow Mini Babybel cheeses, with the waxy shell that's fun to peel open.

3. FRUIT BOWLS

These little snack packs containing fruit chunks like pineapple, oranges, and melon provide a healthy complement for a protein-packed lunch or snack. They are a good source of vitamin C, come in a variety of fruit choices and don't leave sticky fingers. Just

remember to go for the all-natural, unsweetened variety (as opposed to the many that are packed “in light syrup”) to avoid extra carbs and unnecessary corn syrup.

CARBS: 16g in Whole Foods Pineapple Snack(R) 4oz bowl (1g fiber)

Other decent options: DelMonte Pineapple Tidbits(R) (18g carbs) and Dole Pineapple Tidbits in Juice(R) (15g carbs).

4. TRAIL MIX

For kids who like concoctions, consider a customized trail mix. Add 1/4 cup dry roasted almonds, 1/4 cup sunflower seeds, 1 tablespoon semi-sweet mini chocolate chips, and 3 tablespoons unsweetened shredded coconut to a big bowl. Stir it up and dump it into a zip lock bag. It’s portable, packable and -- as long as the M&M'S(R) stay out of the mix -- healthy, delivering a whopping 15 grams of protein. You can also find snack bags of chocolate-free trail mix, but they’re often very high in carbs because of the amount of dried fruit.

CARBS: 26 grams (9g fiber)

Note: You can substitute the following nuts for almonds without raising the carb count: hazelnuts, brazil nuts, pecans, macadamias, or walnuts. (Peanuts are just slightly higher in carbs – almonds contain 1.4g in two tablespoons, peanuts 1.8g.)

5. APPLESAUCE CUPS

Though they taste better chilled, these handy cups require no refrigeration, which is great for convenience and packability. Make sure to choose unsweetened varieties, which will provide a nice helping of potassium, along with a little protein and some fiber. Choose cinnamon-flavored if your little ones are fans.

CARBS: 12g in a Whole Foods 365 Organic Unsweetened Applesauce(R) 4oz bowl (2g fiber).

Note: Applesauce containing high fructose corn syrup will be much higher in carbs. Some brands offer “no sugar added” varieties, but these contain artificial sweeteners. Choose natural-styles like Mott’s(R) Natural Applesauce and Musselman’s(R) Natural Unsweetened Applesauce.

6. PROTEIN BARS

Beware of energy bars that are merely glorified candy bars. Look for bars that are lower in carbs and added sugars. Don't let the packaging fool you: Despite health claims, some of them still contain more corn syrup than protein. Read the ingredients list, and pay close attention to the first few listed (ingredients are always listed by amount used, in descending order).

CARBS: 20g (3g fiber) in a Clif Kid (R) Z bar, Peanut Butter flavor

Other options: Kellogg's(R) Fiber Plus bar (Chocolate Chip), with 26g of carbs and 9 grams of fiber, and Fiber One(R) Chewy Bars (Oats & Peanut Butter), with 28g of carbs and 9g of fiber. When eating foods with added fiber, stick to the recommended serving of one bar. Overconsumption can cause gastrointestinal problems.

7. COTTAGE CHEESE SNACK PACKS

Cottage cheese is a great dairy alternative that comes in snack cups that can provide up to 11 grams of protein. Unlike yogurt, plain cottage cheese has a mild, neutral flavor. So depending on who it's for, you can choose the cups without fruit in them and add your own or stick to the lower-carb fruit-added varieties.

CARBS: 12g in a 4oz cup of Breakstone's Lowfat Cottage Cheese with Pineapple (6g without fruit)

8. APPLE

The icon of good health, a shiny red apple is one of the perfect, portable snacks. (It's also been known to assist in knocking out loose teeth.) Keep the skin on for the fiber benefits and, when you can, choose organic to minimize pesticide residues.

CARBS: 17g (3g fiber)

9. VEGGIES AND DIP

It's easier to up kids' veggie intakes with portable packages that offer the fun of dipping. Look in your produce section for mini packs of veggies like peeled carrots, celery, or broccoli and cherry tomatoes. Tucked inside will also be a container of dip. These little plastic covered trays fit nicely in a lunch pack or can be tossed into a bag for the park.

CARBS: 7g in a 2.25 oz pack of Earthbound Organic(R) (1g fiber)

10. BLACK OLIVES

The ultimate finger food, the black olive is a powerhouse of nutrients. Ten pitted jumbo olives (1/2 cup, or one for each finger) deliver just 2 grams of carbs, plus a nice little dose of fiber, protein, and healthy monounsaturated fats.

CARBS: 2g in Lindsay(R) Low Sodium Pitted Ripe Olives

Note: Since olives can be high in sodium, buy low sodium varieties or rinse before serving.

11. POPCORN

What other food gets its own button on a microwave? Movie or no, popcorn is a low carb, convenient, and healthy snack, as long as you steer clear of trans fats. Because popcorn is the whole grain, it's more filling and more nutritious than most other corn or wheat snacks. And you can't beat its feather-light weight when it comes to packing.

CARBS: 18g in 3.5 cups of Newman's Own(R) Natural Flavor Microwave unbuttered popcorn (3g fiber)

12. CEREAL

Most cereals are very high-carb with not much in the way of redeeming nutritional value, other than the vitamins and minerals added to them. But these days, if you look hard you can find whole-grain, high-protein (look for at least 8g per cup), high-fiber (look for at least 5g per cup) options. Pour 1/2 cup of boxed cereal into a sealable snack bag, and you've got an easy, crunchy snack.

CARBS: 18.5g in 1/2 cup GoLean Crunch!(R) (4g fiber)