

Energy boost

Providing a range of exciting end-of-day snacks can help keep children going until dinner.

June Graham shares some ideas for sweet and savoury foods that pack a punch

Some of our children attend our setting full time and have a long journey ahead of them at the end of the day, so by pick-up time they need a little energy boost to keep them going until dinnertime.

I noticed that several parents arrive with small containers of snacks for their children to eat, but I thought it would be a good idea to make end-of-day snacks available for all the children in our nursery.

Good presentation is essential, as is giving children the freedom – and information – to choose what they would like to eat. So the snacks are presented in a big basket and displayed in clear Cellophane bags, thus ensuring the snacks are packaged hygienically and the children are able to see the contents and choose what they want.

There is now a wide variety of snacks, from the simple – such as small packs of rice cakes and rusk biscuits – to the more exotic.

Dried fruit, such as apple rings and sultanas, feature in many of the packs, sometimes on their own or with pieces of ‘treasure’, either chocolate buttons or raisins covered in chocolate or yoghurt. These have to be dairy-free for some of our children. One tropical mix of dried fruits has proved so popular with one particular child that we have named it ‘Phoebe Mix’ after her.

I avoid using nuts in any of the snacks due to children with nut allergies, and I have also started to exclude sesame seeds, again because of potential allergy problems. I do, however, try to include unfamiliar fruits and seeds, such as goji berries, which are the one of the most nutritionally dense fruits available, and chia seeds, which are used in some of the baked snacks.

When introducing these, I started by making little trial bags available for children and parents to try and



produced factsheets about them, as I have for some of the other snacks to support the children in their choice.

Popcorn is a favourite with the children and is such a great snack. It contains twice the amount of antioxidant that any fruit has and is the only food that is 100 per cent wholegrain. One serving of popcorn provides over 70 per cent of the daily recommended intake of wholegrain. I invested in a hot air popcorn popper because the popcorn made in it is lower in calories than when made any other way, and contains half the calories of microwave popcorn.

Baked goods are invariably popular so the likes of banana bread, flapjacks or savoury muffins are often available. We use lots of fruit in the flapjacks and just a little honey to sweeten them, so we don't need to add much sugar. Honey, of course, should not be used for children under a year old. Courgette and cheese muffins or butternut squash muffins are very tasty and sugar free. Since buying a cake pop maker, I have been using it to make them and the muffin balls are popular.

Currently under development are granola pops, or – as I call them – ‘breakfast on a stick’. These are like granola bars, but round and on a stick like a lollipop. I brush them with chocolate to finish them off and to make them more cohesive to the stick. When wrapped up, they look like cake pops. I had been making

them with a no-cook recipe, but since buying the cake pop maker, life got a lot simpler and I can make the cooked kind, which is lighter and tastier. I have included the recipe.

We normally have between six and eight different snack choices every day for the children. Changes are made every few days, but I try to ensure that popcorn is available every day as it is so popular.

We hope to soon have a selection of fruits in our healthy snacks stand and I am currently sourcing suitable containers. We do, however, have a community fruit basket, which parents can add fruit to. All our children are invited to have a piece of fruit on the way out. I have also been experimenting with small tubs of dips to go with items such as breadsticks. ■

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GRANOLA POP RECIPE

Ingredients

100g butter
50g demerara sugar
3 tbsp honey
200g porridge oats
250g dried fruit and seeds of your choice

I used tropical fruits, raisins, goji berries, chia seeds, linseeds, cherries and cranberries.

Method

● Melt the butter, sugar and honey together and add to the dry ingredients. The mixture is very sticky, so you might want to use a little cornflour to enable you to roll it into small balls

that will fit the cake pop maker. They take around five minutes to cook this way.

● When cool, melt a little chocolate and use the lollipop stick to make a hole. Dip the stick in the melted chocolate and insert into the hole. When the sticks are all set and firm in the pops, you can use a pastry brush to coat the pops in chocolate. Leave to dry and wrap in Cellophane. Alternatively, press the granola into a greased baking tin and bake for around 25 minutes at 180 °C/gas mark 5.