

Tips from the Trenches – Manz Elementary School

Topic: Healthy Snacks on a Budget

We know that families are often searching for tips/ideas about how to handle things at home. We plan to send out some “tips” written by our very own Manz staff members to provide families with some helpful information.

Si usted quiere ayuda en interpretar esta carta, por favor póngase en contacto con el asistente de educación bilingüe al 715-852-3962 y deje un mensaje con su nombre y número de teléfono.

Yog koj xav tau kev pab kom koj nkag siab tsab ntawv nov zoo, hais ua lus Hmoob. Thov hu xov tooj rau koj tus menyuam lub tsev kawm ntawv yog 715-852-3962. Hais lus tseg, hais koj lub npe thiab muab koj tus xov tooj tseg. Peb ib tug neeg txhais lus mam li hu qhia rau koj kom koj nkag siab zoo tshaj qhov nov ntxiv.

Tip: Providing healthy snacks is not only good for your child’s physical health and well-being; nutritious snacks are good for healthy brain development and learning.

The holiday season is a time when families typically try to make dollars stretch further, so hopefully these tips for how to find and prepare healthy snacks on a budget will help keep students healthy and focused on learning while helping families stick to their budget.

- **Make a list of healthy snack foods prior to grocery shopping.** Have your child help with this. Ask them what they like. They often see snacks that others bring and think it’s something they’d like to try.
- **Stick to your list.** It’s easy to get side-tracked and purchase things that aren’t on the list, and this often leads to going over your budget. Some families find it easier to stick to the list if they shop without the children. Other families like to include their children in the process. You need to make the decision that works best for your family.
- **Make fruits and vegetables a priority.** The long-term benefits of eating fruits and vegetables is worth every penny. While fresh is often best, canned, dried, and frozen are also rich in nutrients, are sometimes more economical, and do have a longer shelf-life.
- **Encourage your child to try new fruits and vegetables.**
- **Shop for produce that’s in season.** This website from the United States Department of Agriculture has great information about which fruits and vegetables are in season, as well as recipes and information on nutrition and storage:
<https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/seasonal-produce-guide>

- **Prepare snacks in advance.** Cut up fruits and vegetables on the weekend (kids love to help with this!), and package them in plastic bags or re-usable containers. Have snacks easily accessible in a bin in the fridge so your child can grab one in the morning as they're preparing for their day. Make your own snack mixes with dried fruits, pretzels, popcorn, etc. (please avoid nuts if there are allergies in your child's class). Another great idea if you send in non-perishable snacks is to put snacks in your child's back pack the night before.
- **Use leftovers.** (hard boiled eggs, fruit salad, veggies and dip, half of a sandwich, homemade pizza...why not? YUM!)
- **Purchase off-brands, shop at discount stores, and use coupons.**
- **Stock up on sales.** Use caution here; if it doesn't get eaten it's not a good deal.
- **Stop buying junk foods.** They offer little nutritional value and brain fuel, and they are also expensive.
- **Keep portion sizes in mind.** A snack at school is just that; a snack. There is no need to send a full meal with your child. A portion size is about the size of the palm of your child's hand, and they really don't need more than that. Snack time in most classrooms is usually less than ten minutes, so send only what your child will eat in that time to avoid wasting food.
- **Weekend Kids' Meals.** If your family would like to receive Weekend Kids' Meals to help offset the rising cost of meals/snacks, please contact your child's teacher or our Partnership Coordinator, Val Logan (vlogan@ecasd.us) to sign up. This program is available to all families and there are no income requirements.
- **Free and Reduced Lunch.** Your family may qualify for free or reduced lunch and breakfast prices, which could allow more room in your budget for purchasing healthy snacks. For more information go to the ECASD Food and Nutrition webpage: <https://www.ecasd.us/District/Departments/Food-and-Nutrition/Free-and-Reduced-Information>

Teachers prefer that snacks sent to school are low in added sugar, and we ask families to keep food allergies in mind that might be present in your child's classroom. Please check with your child's teacher if you're unsure if a certain food is allowed in the classroom. Unless there's a special event or celebration where candy is provided, teachers strongly discourage candy as a snack at school.

So, now I need to step down off my soap box for a minute. I too have been the busy mom. I was in college full-time and working part-time when my children were in elementary school. I GET IT. Really, we all get it. Did we occasionally send in a snack cake or bag of cheese puffs for a snack with our children? Probably. The key word here is "occasionally." When possible, please send healthy snacks. Setting good examples and providing children with the tools and education to make good nutritional choices now will be a benefit they'll enjoy their entire lives.

Thank you for all you do to ensure your child arrives at school ready to learn!

Mrs. Bauer