A Sticky Situation

The Truth behind "Fruit" Snacks

Jennifer Micolichek
UW-Green Bay Dietetic Intern - 2008

It seems too good to be true…an inexpensive, convenient low-fat snack with real fruit and Vitamin C that your kids beg for. Fruit snacks!

Many parents realize that real fruit is a better option, so why do they justify feeding their children these sticky treats? For starters, the box claims that the fruit snacks are made with real fruit juice, contain Vitamin C, and are low-fat…just like real fruit. Besides the health claims parents are drawn to the convenience, low cost, and the nonperishable nature of fruit snacks. And to top it off, the food industry make these treats fun for kids –how could a 5 year old resist peeling apart their food into a dozen different shapes, or biting into a fruit snack with sour goo in the middle, or getting a snack shaped like their favorite Disney character…the options are endless!

The food industry may polish up fruit snacks to look like a healthy alternative to fruit, but these sugar tidbits are deceiving. To start with, the major ingredient in almost all fruit snacks is high fructose corn syrup…aka…sugar. The high sugar content in fruit snacks dramatically increases the calories –excessive caloric intake can result in obesity and chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Another issue with the sugar in fruit snacks is that that they contribute to the sticky texture, which causes the snacks to stick to teeth. If the sugar is not cleaned off of teeth appropriately it can cause tooth decay. Another thing to consider is how those tie-dyed fruit roll-ups are such vibrant colors of blue, yellow, green, and red. The color must be from real fruits like blueberries, limes, lemons, and strawberries…right? In reality these neon colors are from food coloring, which researchers suggest may be linked to behavioral problems in children. The biggest harm of eating fruit snacks is that they squeeze healthier foods out of the diet, like fruit, that contain fiber, phytochemicals, and a variety of vitamins.

Check out the Advantages of Munching on Real Fruit

- Contains fiber – that will fill your stomach up and help you feel fuller longer
- Reduces your risk of developing cancer, heart disease, stroke, and obesity
- Convenient – can just grab a banana or an apple for on the go
- Greener – eating fruits is better for the environment because there is no packaging waste
- Low fat and low calorie
- Fun – go to an orchard to pick your own fruit or grow it in your own garden
- Low cost when fruit is purchased canned, frozen, or in-season

Check out the Nutrients of Fruit Snacks versus Real Fruit

	Serving Size	Calories	Fat (g)	Sodium (mg)	Dietary Fiber (g)	Sugar (g)
Gushers	1 Pouch	90	1	55	0	13
Fruit by the Foot	1 Roll	80	1	50	0	10
Regular Fruit Snacks	1 Pouch (0.9 oz)	78	0	5	0	12.7
Apple	1 Small (3.7 oz)	55	0	1	2.5	11
Banana	1 Small (2.9 oz)	72	0	1	2	10
Grapes	10 Grapes	34	0	1	0.5	9

Notice:

- More fiber in real fruit
- More fat in fruit snacks
- More sodium in fruit snacks
- Sugar is not drastically different, but the sugar in fruit snacks is derived from concentrated fruit juice, cane sugar, and/or high fructose corn syrup; unlike naturally occurring sugar in real fruit.
- With the real fruit you are getting more food for fewer calories. On average fruit snacks have 90 calories in a 0.5 to 1 oz pouch; a 3 oz piece of real fruit typically contains about 60 calories.

Ways to make Eating Fresh Fruit Fun

- Fruit kabobs – cut up fresh fruit & put them on a popsicle stick
- Dip fresh fruit slices in yogurt or peanut butter
- Fruit leather – made from 100% real fruit & fruit juices (see recipe below)
- Dried fruit
- Freeze fruit - grapes are like mini popsicles when frozen
- Make fresh fruit visible – put in a bowl on the counter or on the top shelf in the refrigerator
- Bag small fresh fruits – like grapes & berries for individually portioned snacks

Fruit Leather Recipe

Ingredients

- Any ripe fruit (apples, peaches, berries, etc.) – seeds/core removed but peel in tact
- Small amount of Water

Directions

- Mix fruit & water in blender. Add ripe banana if too tart. Should be thick.
- Line flat pan with plastic wrap.
- Pour fruit into pan & spread to ¼ inch thickness.
- Place in warm oven (125 degrees) with oven door slightly ajar.
- When you can pick it up & remove it from the plastic in is dry enough (about 12 hours).
- Cut into squares, roll up, or tear off.

Resources

http://www.easyfunschool.com/article1091.html
http://www.calorieking.com
http://health.kaboose.com/nutrition/unhealthy-snacks-fruit-snacks.html
http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/health/yh/archives/2004/spring/fruit.htm
http://www.fda.gov/Fdac/features/1997/297_five.html