

Are Protein Bars a Healthy Choice for On-the-go Kids?



Between running errands, taking kids to practices, and attending games, events, and other activities, it can be hard to plan healthy meals and snacks for a busy family. Although you may already know that fast food is not always a nutritious choice, alternative on-the-go options, such as protein bars, might not be the healthiest either. Although these bars can be fast and convenient, it is important to understand how to help make healthier choices for kids.

Benefits

Although protein bars won't beat out a well-balanced meal or snack, they can be a healthier choice than fast food, concession stand food, and food in vending machines. We also know that a protein bar would be a better option than skipping a meal entirely. Although protein bars can be a simple and

relatively mess-free option, there are some drawbacks to offering protein bars to children.

Drawbacks

Not all protein bars are created equal. While some protein bars may provide a rich supply of nutrients, other bars' nutritional content may be closer to that of a candy bar. Most children don't need extra protein and young athletes would benefit more from protein-rich foods like lean meats, low-fat dairy, eggs, nuts, and seeds. Along with unnecessary protein, some bars may contain extra calories from added sugars, unhealthy fats, and extra carbohydrates that are intended for endurance adult athletes. Protein bars usually come with a high price tag too. Some bars cost up to \$5.00 each, so buyers beware!

For more information check out more Family Fun on the Run Newsletters:

<http://go.unl.edu/familyfun>

Additional Tips:

Instead of packing expensive, protein bars, plan ahead to pack nutritious meals and snacks. Try quick and easy foods that contain whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean protein foods, and low-fat dairy. Easy ideas for snacks on the run include fresh fruit, such as apples and bananas with peanut butter; whole grain crackers with cheese; or a homemade trail mix with dried fruit, nuts, and whole grain cereal. When packing meals and snacks, just remember the food safety rules. Visit USDA's Food Safety Basics website to review how to clean, separate, cook, and chill foods properly.

Sources:

1. *A Guide to Eating for Sports*, TeenHealth, Nemours: <https://bit.ly/30ExCbk>
2. *Food Safety Basics*, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA): <https://bit.ly/3F1Nviv>