

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

Juggling errands, transporting kids to practices, and participating in games, events, and various activities can make it challenging to prepare healthy meals and snacks for a busy family. While it's clear that fast food isn't always the best option, other convenient choices like protein bars may not be the healthiest alternatives either. Though these bars offer speed and convenience, it's essential to learn how to guide kids toward other options as well.

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 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 over \$5.00 each, so buyers beware!

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/3F1Nvij>



Additional Tips:

Instead of packing costly, protein bars, plan ahead to pack nutritious meals and snacks. Opt for quick and easy options that include whole grains, fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, and low-fat dairy. Convenient snack ideas for on-the-go include fresh fruit like apples and bananas paired with peanut butter, whole grain crackers with cheese, or a homemade trail mix featuring dried fruits, nuts, and whole grain cereal. When packing meals and snacks, just remember the food safety rules. Visit USDA's Food Safety website to review how to clean, separate, cook, and chill foods properly.

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