



# GOOD Bite

at home

A nutrition fact sheet for parents and carers of children 0-5 years

## Packing healthy food for your child while they are in child care and when they go to school

### What to pack for morning and afternoon tea?

Providing a variety of nutritious foods for mid meals can help develop healthy eating habits. Such foods include

- Vegetables: raw and cooked
- Fruit: fresh, canned
- Breads and cereals: preferably wholemeal or wholegrain
- Dairy foods: cheese, yoghurt, custard, milk (including calcium fortified soy milk)
- Lean meat and alternatives such as eggs, tofu etc

### What about snack bars (health food bars)?

Most people these days would suspect that muesli bars, cereal bars and oat slices are not as healthy as manufacturers would like you to believe. 'Choice' magazine recently rated 224 snack bars using the 'Health Star Rating' criteria.

'Health Star rating' (HSR) assigns a number of stars to a food product ranging from half a star (a very poor choice) to five stars (a very good choice). It takes into account

- Kilojoules (energy), sugar, salt and saturated fat, all of which are associated with chronic lifestyle diseases that can start in early childhood such as overweight, obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease.
- Positive aspects such as protein content, fibre content and the fruit, vegetables and nuts content.

The HSR system is voluntary and not all manufacturers put the HSR on their products. According to 'Choice', some manufacturers only put the HSR on their healthiest products. Manufacturers were five times less likely to display the HSR if their snack bar had a rating of 2.5 stars or less.



For people with a smart phone or a tablet, there is an App called 'FoodSwitch'. This will tell you the HSR of nearly all food products in the supermarket. Using the App, scan the bar code of a product. Healthier versions of the same product line will then be displayed for you to choose from. Go to <https://www.bupa.com.au/foodswitch> to download the App.

The 'Choice' review (using the HSR) of those 224 snack bars, found that the majority had high levels of sugar and fat despite claims of being 'all natural' and 'nothing artificial added'. Fat and sugar are natural, but not necessarily good for you. Some snack bars were high in salt (sodium).

Snack bars include not just muesli, oat and cereal bars. They also include nut bars, seed bars and raw bars. For most centres where food is brought from home, they are likely to ban nut containing bars due to food allergies. In Choice's review they analysed snack bars with nuts and snack bars without nuts, separately.

Choice found no nut free bars with a 5 star rating. They found:

**4 nut free bars with a 4.5 star rating**

**25 nut free bars with a 4 star rating**

**4 nut free bars with a 3.5 star rating**

**The remaining had 3 stars or less**



**According to the Choice information, the following range of nutrients were in the 224 bars (i.e. all bars including those with nuts).**

	Minimum	Maximum
Serve size	20g	120g
Kilojoules/serve	213kJ	2412kJ
Saturated Fat/100g	0.1 gram	21 grams
Sugar/100g	3 grams	52 grams
Fibre/100g	0.4 gram	30.8 grams
Protein/100g	1.7 grams	27 grams
Sodium (Salt) /100g	2 milligrams	420 milligrams
Whole grains/100g	0.1 gram	23 grams

### What the Health Star Rating does not take into account when it comes to snack bars

- *Oral Health:* some health food bars can be very sticky and cling to teeth. Consequently, they are not tooth friendly.
- *Packaging:* some child care centres are trying to be environmentally friendly by discouraging pre - packaged food.
- *Cost:* while it can be convenient, commercial, pre-packaged food is often costly (not good for the budget) e.g. on the day this Good Bite was written, the price of a snack bar was compared to the price of fruit. The price of muesli bars ranged from \$14.00 to \$30.00 kg. Bananas were \$3.00 kg, apples were \$4.50 kg.

### The importance of variety

Choosing a variety of foods is important and, even if children do have their favourites, it is wise to encourage new and different healthy food experiences. Snack bars could be part of this variety of food experiences **but**

- If you are already packing fruit, vegetable, dairy and cereal based snacks, don't change!
- check the food policy of your child's centre
- don't pack snack bars in the lunch box every day
- If you do pack snack bars, choose ones that have at least 3.5 stars.



## Contact Us!

This fact sheet is produced by the Central Coast Public Health/Community Nutrition Team. If you have any suggestions or nutrition topics you would like covered please contact us by telephone on 4320 3691 or fax on 4320 2828.



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