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SNACKING TIME

We invite our readers to ask a natural therapist their burning questions. **Gemma Hurditch** is our expert for this issue, for the College of Naturopathic Medicine

Q My children are four and seven and never eat proper meals - they love to graze all day long. They eat healthily but I thought by now they'd be settled into more of a routine with eating. However much I try and impose a routine it doesn't work and we go back to snacking. Am I setting them up for problems when they are older?

A There are arguments both for and against snacking. Snacks can be meal foods but just in smaller portions. So long as they are choosing whole, preferably organic balanced snacks and not snacks high in simple carbohydrate or sugar (like my niece, who would live on grapes if she could), then I would suggest they can be encouraged to eat naturally and to satisfy their appetite. The problems that they may face are more likely to be logistical than health-wise, as often schools and workplaces are not conducive to snacking. The questions that you can

ask yourself if you are worried about their food consumption include; are they getting plenty of vegetables and some fruit? Are they choosing some nuts and seeds everyday? Is the majority of their food in its 'whole' state ie. not processed. Are they eating adequate protein for their age and weight? Are they growing well and staying healthy? Are they using 'snack time' to avoid other activities or chores? In short, are they using food as a tool, or to nourish themselves. If you are happy with your answers, snack on!

Q How can I strengthen my three children's (ages two, six and seven) immune systems for when we go travelling to South East Asia this summer. I want to boost their gut health as much as possible before we go to protect them. Can you offer any advice?

A A high quality probiotic supplement, particularly if they have been on antibiotics

through the winter, is a great start. I like Optibac for Babies & Children. Reduce wheat which can be a gut irritant. Try quinoa, brown rice and gluten-free oats instead of wheat pasta, toast etc. Encourage oily fish consumption a few times a week, try homemade salmon and sardine fish cakes. Walnuts and Brazil nuts are great immune boosting snacks (make into a nice nut butter and spread on rice cakes with a little honey). Make organic green smoothies with some spinach, berries and frozen mango or banana for immune supporting antioxidants. Whilst away, avoid stomach upsets with the aid of citricidal or grapefruit seed extract; add 5 drops per litre to tap water for drinking or teeth brushing. Never take citricidal undiluted and refer to manufacturers' instructions. Avoid ice in drinks. Saccharomyces boulardii, has therapeutic action against stomach upset. It is immuno-

stimulating and antimicrobial (of the type of microbes you don't want). Choose a product that doesn't require refrigeration and has billions of units per capsule to take for emergencies.

Q My daughter is four and has eczema which flares up in the hot weather. I would like to help her from a nutritional standpoint this year but don't know where to start. What would you suggest?

A Eczema has different triggers for different people. Is your daughter eating something in hot weather that is triggering her eczema? Investigate a rotation and elimination diet to identify food culprits. Increase consumption of seafood, a rainbow coloured variety of vegetables and raw nuts to support skin integrity and healthy immune balance. Opt for organic. Getting adequate sun exposure for vitamin D synthesis is also key; short bursts of full sun (not through glass) with arms and legs exposed and no sunscreen should do the trick; a D3 supplement can help in the colder months. Taking probiotics, particularly *L. rhamnosus* can be helpful in warding off flare ups. You may need to do something about hot weather conditions too. Sweat in skin creases can be aggravating, be sure to keep the bedroom cool and use only natural fibres for bedlinen and clothing. Corn starch/flour can be helpful and is preferable to talcum powder (do not use talc) to help combat sweat. A little bicarb soda mixed in with corn starch is antibacterial and may reduce chance of skin infection. A naturopathic herbalist could mix up some beneficial herbs.

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