

By Matt Gross/DadWagon.com Thursday, December 2, 2010

Yesterday, I thought I was being really smart. In the late afternoon, I'd happened into a chic, newish Park Slope coffee shop, Venticinque, and as I was ordering a little pick-me-up, I spotted something on the counter: chocolate-chip cookies, \$1 apiece.

Now, I wasn't particularly hungry, but they might be just the thing to give to my 2-year-old daughter, Sasha, when I picked her up from daycare in an hour. Three stops on the subway may not seem like much, but that kid can get jumpy and cranky fast. A cookie, however unhealthy, could keep her occupied. Maybe. (More on Time.com: "Mompetition": Why You Just Can't Make Mom Friends)

An hour or so later, I sat her on my lap on the F train, reached into my pocket and pulled out the cookie, only slightly melted from my body heat. Sasha grew excited as I unwrapped its plastic sheath, and when she bit in and smiled, I felt vindicated. That is, until she spit out the chocolate chips, or rather let them dribble out of her mouth and down the front of her jacket. I sighed and tried to scoop up (and eat) the crumbs. Another snack time, another failure.

But that's what I've come to expect in the ongoing struggle to keep my child happy, healthy and well-fed. Mealtimes are one thing, but snacks are proving a particularly trying subject for me, as they apparently do for all parents. What do you give kids? When? Why? (More on Time.com: Do Parents Discriminate Against Their Own Chubby Children?)

Or maybe you shouldn't give them snacks at all, writes Amy Graff in the San Francisco Chronicle:

Snacks are readily available everywhere. Starbucks now sells packaged snacks for kids. Many Whole Foods stores feature a kids' snack table where little hands are free to take a packet of organic crackers or a fruit leather. At Costco you can pick up gallon-size boxes of goldfish. At the end of a children's soccer game, there's always a pile of sliced oranges, cinnamon bread, or GoGurts. No wonder nobody wants to eat their dinner!

It's reached a point where I've begun to wonder, could this whole snacking thing be spiraling out of control? Could our children be eating way too many crackers, even if the crackers are organic and locally made?

The first person Graff quotes on this is, of course, a doctor:

"Yes, kids are eating way too many snacks," says Dr. Lisa Dana, a mother of three children and pediatrician at Golden Gate Pediatrics. "A 2-year-old can make it without a snack between meals. We've gotten into this mindset that kids should eat all the time. This catches up with them when they become adults and they're used to eating all the time. They get used to this mindless eating. And people wonder why we have a problem with obesity in this country."

In addition, seemingly healthy snacks like fruit are suspect, since they contain a lot of sugar.

Also crackers. All of this makes perfect, unimpeachable sense. And yet...

I have a hard time with this. Partly, I imagine, because I am not a natural snacker. I virtually never snack, confining my intake almost solely to meals (two a day, three if you count a cup of coffee as breakfast). Once upon a time, however, I snacked like a madman: bags of Doritos, half-gallons of Breyer's mint chocolate chip, bowling alley french fries, and every kind of sweet soft drink on the planet. Somehow, though, I just stopped. Today, because the concept of snacking is so foreign to me, I forget that little Sasha, with her small stomach and high metabolism, just gets hungry more often. She doesn't have to snack, but snacking makes the day — and subway rides, and grocery runs, and pretty much every errand — go by more easily. (More on Time.com: Photos: Summer Programs Keep Kids' Minds Sharp)

In the past few months, Sasha's snacks have included (in no particular order) crackers, cookies, lollipops, apples, oranges, pork buns, plain buns, baby carrots, pickles, and pretzels. Am I now supposed to question these choices? To add an extra level of self-doubt to the already fraught process of simply trying to remember that my child might be hungry between meals and then finding something for her to consume?

And so here's the thing: Just as we ourselves don't eat solely for nourishment, we give our kids snacks not just because they're hungry. We do it because snacks taste good, because their friends are snacking, because we just want them to shut up and be quiet on the F train and not flail around on the filthy floor like they're preparing for careers as urine-soaked homeless panhandlers. Those are not necessarily 100 percent virtuous reasons, but little of what we as parents do is perfect. It's up to us to mitigate our mistakes, to let the kids of whatever age know that one lollipop is enough for one week, and that maybe you're withholding today's Xtreme Chipwich (or whatever kids eat these days) because dinner's going to be really fantastic, and that, you know what, if you really want a cookie, let's take a nice, long bike ride to this place in Queens that's supposed to have the best in the city. Balance is what I'm talking about, folks, and I don't mean Balance Bars. Those things are just gross.

Read more:

<http://healthland.time.com/2010/12/02/are-we-oversnacking-our-kids/#ixzz17I2Dklac>