

Take the Paper Plate Snack Test!

With increasing concern about the growing number of overweight American children, it's becoming more and more important that youngsters know and understand the value of making healthy choices. This is sometimes a hard concept for children to grasp. To a young child, the premise is simple: Foods that taste good are good for us, too... right? Sadly, we adults know better. Foods that "taste good" are often full of things our bodies don't need, such as sodium, sugar, and fat.

When it comes to nutrition, a good place to start with young children is to help them understand the things that are in our foods that they can't see. In this activity, your child will use a simple test to determine which of his favorite snack foods is full of fat, something his body only needs in small amounts.



What You Need:

- Plain paper plates, with no gloss or coatings (or brown paper grocery bags, cut into squares about the same size as a paper plate)
- An assortment of pieces of food: potato chips, raisins, French fries, peanut butter, grapes, apple slices, pretzels
- Vegetable oil
- Water
- 2 small paint brushes
- Pencil

What You Do:

1. Have your child use a paintbrush to brush a small amount of water on the left side of a paper plate. Use the other paintbrush to brush a small amount of oil on the right side of the paper plate. Use a pencil to label each sample. Leave the plate undisturbed and give it about an hour to dry.
2. After about an hour, check the results. Have your child compare the water side to the oil side and describe what he sees. Explain that oil is a fat, and fat leaves a spot or a ring on paper. Fats are present in lots of food, and our bodies do, in fact, need some fat to keep us warm and give us energy, but eating too many fatty foods can be harmful to our bodies and our health.
3. You can even have him touch each side to feel the difference. The water side will feel clean, while the oil side will feel slick and leave a residue on his fingers. Explain to him that this is similar to what goes on in your body when you eat food. Water cleans your body and nourishes it, while oil (fats) leaves behind a kind of "residue" once it's been processed, adding to the fat in your body.
4. Now have your child test some pieces of food, two pieces per plate. Have him set the food pieces flat on the plate, and label each piece. (Note: Something like a potato chip, which may not lay flat, may need to be crunched up. A grape may need to be sliced down the middle, etc.)
5. In an hour or so, have him check his paper plate tests. Which foods were fatty (i.e. which foods left a ring like the oil? Which did not appear to have lots of fat in them? What can your child conclude about which snack foods are the most healthy?

Encourage your child to draw connections between what he has learned in this activity and the food that he puts into his body. It's first and foremost a parent's job to set their children on the right path for a long, healthy future. Don't be surprised if your child starts making healthier choices after doing this activity!

