

4 Easy Ways to Enjoy Tasty (and Healthy) Party Treats

Too many parties are focused on food with piles of cupcakes, cookies, candy, chips, and sugary drinks on the menu. While all foods or beverages can be part of a healthy eating style, in moderation, high-calorie celebrations have become almost daily norms rather than special events. However, savvy parents and teachers know that, when it comes to parties, children are usually not as concerned about the food and drink choices as the adults are. What kids want most is to share time with their friends and important adults. That's why smart families and schools are finding easy ways to make healthy food so much fun that children don't even know that it is good for them!

Enjoy **SMALLER PORTIONS** of traditional treats.

In a balanced eating style, there is always room for reasonably sized portions of desserts and other higher fat, higher sugar foods. The secret is to start with plenty of nutrient-rich options, such as sandwiches, crackers and cheese, veggies with dip, or slices of sweet fruit. Then include small cupcakes, mini-candies, or bite-size cookies - enough for a everyone to have something sweet. Serve chips, nuts, and other salty snacks in small cups rather than gigantic bowls.

Coordinate **BRIGHT COLORS** to the celebration.

"*Eat your colors*" is awesome advice for good health, great taste, and party fun. Fruits and veggies come in all colors to coordinate with holidays (a selection of green spring veggies with Ranch dip for St. Patrick's Day), a school mascot (orange slices and blueberries), or a child's favorite colors (red + green = strawberries + kiwi kebobs on a plastic straw). Want a sparkling substitute for pop? Mix bright-colored juice (pomegranate or blueberry) with club soda or seltzer water.

Feature **FUN SHAPES** of everyday foods.

When it comes to special occasions, cookie cutters are a cook's best friend. Kid-pleasing sandwiches can be cut into every imaginable shape - hearts at Valentine's, bunnies for Easter, pumpkins for Halloween, or trees at Christmas. Other foods can easily be cut into fun shapes too, like ghosts cut from white and yellow cheese slices or small gingerbread people cut from fruit slices (apples, pears, or watermelon). All it takes is a few inexpensive cookie cutters and a tiny bit of creativity.

Create **SILLY FACES** from a variety of foods.

This theme has unlimited variations, because kids (of all ages) love to play with their food. Start with a bread slice, a rice cake, crackers, pre-made pizza crust, or clean plate. Spread on a little nut butter, light cream cheese, or pizza sauce. Then everyone creates faces (human, animal, or make-believe) using pre-cut foods: shredded cheese, spaghetti, or pretzel sticks for hair; grapes or cucumber slices for eyes; carrots or pickles for a nose; sliced oranges or apples for a mouth; and so on.

NEED SOME CREATIVE IDEAS FOR YOUR NEXT PARTY? Eat Right Montana members and subscribers recommend *Family Fun Magazine* for easy, low-cost ideas. It's available on many magazine racks or at <http://familyfun.go.com/>. The site itself is packed with party ideas and recipes (many of them are easy and healthy), and it also offers a free newsletter. For more tasty and fun celebration ideas, check out the USDA's new resource, *Create Healthy, Active Celebrations*, ready to download at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhardhealthylifestyle/QuickandEasy/celebrations.pdf>.