Healthy snack ideas for babies & toddlers

**Intro**

Welcome to Sense by Meg Faure, the podcast that's brought to you by Parent Sense the App that takes guesswork out of parenting. If you are a new parent, then you are a good company. Your host, Meg Faure is a well-known OT infant specialist and the author of eight parenting books. Each week, we are going to spend time with new moms and dads just like you to chat about the week's wins, the challenges and the questions of the moment. Subscribe to the podcast, download the Parent Sense App and catch Meg here every week to make the most of that first year of your little one's life. And now meet your host.

**Meg Faure**: Welcome back Mums and Dads. I'm Meg Faure, and this is Sense by Meg Faure and each week I'm joined by either a mum or a professional to talk us through one of the thorny areas or the delightful areas of early parenting. And today I'm absolutely delighted to be joined again by Kath Megaw. Kath is a pediatric dietician. She is the advisor on the Parent Sense App. She runs a very busy private practice where she sees little ones right from Prem babies through until school-aged children with a variety of problems from weight gain to eating across to the more medical side of things and Kath really is, as far as I'm concerned, the authority on infant feeding. She got her pediatric dietetics qualification from the John Hopkins University in the United States of America. But more than that, it's been her extensive experience working with moms and babies over the years. So, this week we are joined by Kath and I would like to really just welcome her on board. Welcome Kath.

**Kath Megaw:** Thanks for having me again, Meg.

**Meg Faure:** Excellent, now one of the funnest projects I have ever worked on Kath was the Weaning Sense book that you and I did together, and Weaning Sense was such an interesting project because it was probably the quickest write of any of my eight books. It was the easiest write of any of my eight books, and yet it's the number one best seller of all of the eight books. And I think it even exceeds Baby Sense now and it really was such a fun book to write. Now when we did it, we focused very much on weaning foods, taking babies through the ready, steady, go stages, the mush purees, the porridges, the family meals, like the mushroom risotto as an example. What we did also do was pop in a couple of snack menus or snack recipes. But having said that, we clearly didn't do a good enough job Kath and the reason for that is that I am always inundated with questions from moms on what snacks do I feed my babies? And so that's the focus of today's topic and that is snacks and on the go meals and what really works well for our little ones. Do you find that lots of moms ask you about snacks?

**Kath Megaw:** Yeah, snacks is a hard one because, snacks in adults’ kind of terms looks the suits away but just not always appropriate for a baby to eat a snack like that, especially your baby that is still weaning, still learning, still navigates in how to eat. So, it is one of a very common question. And also, how to fit in snacks in the schedule of eating is also a big challenge often.

**Meg Faure:** Yeah absolutely. So, we know that weaning can start anywhere between four months and six months of age. But let's say we've started our baby at about five months of age on weaning foods, they're now on three meals a day. At what age do we start to put snacks in between meals into a baby's routine or diet?

**Kath Megaw:** So, I normally tell moms that you can define snacks in twofold; so you get the snacks which are for developmental purpose, which is what we would do with that newly weaned baby. So once they're only three meals, we can start to incorporate snacks once a day at a happy time in a relaxed way that doesn't have to offer nutritional value, but is there for the baby to learn, start learning how to self-feed, how to chew and maybe like a stick of baby bull tongue or a dried sweet mango, something that is safe that they can just chew and it gives a different experience in the mouth. So that is your kind of non-nutritional focused snack and then once your child reaches about eight, nine months and they start dropping their bottle, maybe their mid-morning or they mid-afternoon bottle, you're going to then replace it with a more nutritious snack. So, then the snack will move from just more developmental, non-nutritious focused snack to a more nutritious focused snack. And that's round about eight, nine months.

**Meg Faure:** Yes and of course, that is the time when mums, I mean many of you freak out because your baby wants to have less and less of that feed. So a little bit on that, you have most babies are having around about four feeds or feeding four hourly during the day at about six to seven months of age. So that's kind of feed at maybe six, ten to six as an example. I mean never according to a clock exactly, but approximately and that 10 o'clock in two o'clock feed suddenly becomes a little trickier. They don't want it anymore and that's because they're starting to drop that milk and as Kath mentioned, that happens kind of around about eight months of age and so that's when snacks are very important I suppose. So what happens as you introduce snacks? Do we then pull back the milk intentionally or do we follow a little one's lead and let them start to decrease the amount of milk they're taking in at these mid-afternoon midmorning snack times?

**Kath Megaw:** So I think, I mean you developed the sensory personalities and I always say I slow to warmup babies, well just keep that bottle and those bottle snacks going for every in a day. So sometimes, and the easy going baby as well, they also sometimes need a bit of a push. It's often your sensory sensitive baby or the baby that didn't really love the bottle or milk feed in or your social butterfly that just finds it very unsociable to drink out of a bottle or at your breast and they'll be very keen on the snack and easily drop the bottle. So they will generally lead you, you'll kind of slow to warm up baby that takes a little bit longer to get onto things, needs a bit of encouragement. So definitely by about eight, nine months, if they haven't shown any sign of wanting to decrease that, I normally suggest to moms that they decrease maybe the afternoon one a little bit and halve the bottle and add a snack to that and then slowly, just slowly for your baby, just take it away gently. But it is important to start to remove because remember we’re doing the shift where we moving over from exclusive milk then to milk with some solids and then to solids with some milk and then eventually solids become the priority. So we need to continually move in that direction.

**Meg Faure:** Excellent. So, Kath for that because now we are talking about prioritizing that mid-afternoon or mid-morning snack, let's say from eight months onwards, could you just give us a couple of ideas of really good ideas for snacks at those times?

**Kath Megaw:** So normally in the beginning, because babies are still young and they're still developing the skills for eating, the snacks can still be like a yogurt, which is smooth. So I normally like to always say with the snacks or something the baby can hold and something that you can feed because that normally works quite well. The feeding has obviously got the nutritional elements, especially if you remove the bottle, which is where the nutrition was in. So, be it a bit of yogurt, be it a bit of, can even be a bit of custard that you make at home. It can even be a bit of a fruit puree snack and then alongside that you can have little pieces of soft fruit, or you can have, like I say a baby can gnaw on a little bit of toast with some butter. So those are nice ideas that you can have even like little fritters and little crumpets and little pancake type of snacks are also quite nice because they can be held by the baby, sucked on, eaten and it's actually quite easy for them to learn, chew, and navigate. But I really liked if you're moving the bottle, replace it with like a dairy or if your child can't have dairy then you can do like a dairy alternative. So, it could be coconut yogurt, or it could be a full cream yogurt.

**Meg Faure:** Okay. So do we want to, like with the meals, we like to focus on our proteins, carbs, vegetables, fruits, that type of thing and I mean I've loved, you and I have had a conversation around Grow Glow and Go foods. So your Go foods being energy, your Glow foods being health and your Grow foods being your protein foods. Do we want to put these into, do we want focus on having an element from each of these little food groups into each snack as well? Or are we are going to say no we'll just have one thing in each offer or one thing for the baby to try or one thing for the mom to feed. Is that the principle or do we also want to say we want protein, we want fruit, we want carbs?

**Kath Megaw:** Yeah, I know I don't think for snacks because you know that creates quite bit of pressure when you are trying to incorporate those which are important for our mealtimes, it's snack time, I like it to be a bit more relaxed. And then mom can often a dairy around your snack time, which is from your kind of protein, your go, your grow foods and then you are definitely at one of your snacks you can have some fruit in it but you don't have to have all three. So if you are then bringing in two snacks in the morning, you can have one food that's got your carbs or your go foods with your fat, like your nut butter and then your afternoon you can have your dairy with your fruit or something like that. So, you can kind of over the two snacks incorporate those food groups.

**Interlude**

This episode is brought to us by Parent Sense, the all in one baby and parenting app that helped you make the most of your baby's first year. Don't you wish someone would just tell you everything you need to know about caring for your baby, when to feed them, how to wean them and why they won't sleep? Parent Sense app is like having a baby expert on your phone guiding you to parent with confidence, get a flexible routine, daily tips and advice personalized for you and your little one download parent sense app now from your app store and take the guesswork out of parenting.

**Meg Faure:** And what about things that are traditionally put in mealtimes? Like for instance a chop, chop boiled egg or a slice of cheese as an example. Would you put that in a snack?

**Kath Megaw:** So, you can definitely put that in a snack. Again, it depends on where your baby's at. So, if your baby is developed mentally able to navigate a piece of cheese at snack time, then that's wonderful, it could be a soft cheese, you get some really soft cheeses that the baby can mush between their fingers and that's lovely. Like your cream cheeses.

**Meg Faure:** Yeah, on that, what about your cheeses with mold on them? Like for instance a blue cheese, I mean I know it's a really out there flavor or a Camembert cheese, is that the sort of thing you'd give at snack time?

**Kath Megaw:** You can definitely, you know I've got a little French family, well not a little French family, but a French family I'm looking after, they've got a little one who is weaning and it's been quite awesome to watch what this little one is weaning onto. So absolutely, so it really is what works for you and if you've got a baby that's adventurous and loves different flavors and has that kind of more umami palettes, they would probably love something like that. So, you really can include that, and they are soft, so your cheeses do need to be soft and I think you would just need to also grate in cheese can work really nicely. Great in apple, great in cheese, great in peas, even grate in a bit of celery you can really have some great food, which is not going to be a choking risk that the baby can actually put them in the mouth and just play. So I think it's really important that snack time is an opportunity for a baby to hone on the feed and developmental skills. At seeing in time, we kind of want to get the food in, we need to get the food in and if your baby is a bit slow with that, it might not be the most appropriate time to have this whole learning experience, but snack time is that opportunity to do that.

**Meg Faure:** Absolutely. And Kath another thing that kind of came to mind as you were talking; So you spoke about decreasing the milk and therefore putting some dairy in in the form of a yogurt. Let's talk about the either allergy babies who can't be on a dairy or the vegan babies. What sort of replacements would you put into the snack time for them?

**Kath Megaw:** So with those babies I would use either like a milk alternative so you can make your own homemade custard and you could use like almond milk or you could use oat milk as a base or you can get a coconut yogurt or those type of yogurts. I'm not a big fan of the adult soya products for children because they do have quite a lot of fatter estrogens in it. So I've got no problem with soya formula because that's very regulated and well controlled. But we don't have that same control over our just soya products and we are not always sure where they come from. So having said that, you do have these days lots of different alternatives with your coconut yogurts and that and then you can add in some nut butter which adds the calcium and that element that maybe isn't as and protein which isn't as high in your vegan or dairy alternatives.

**Meg Faure:** Oh, lovely super ideas. So, let's not talk about meals on the go which kind of in some ways are almost like snacks, but let's talk about younger babies. So, this is a baby who's just been weaned, maybe a five-month-old who's actually on a lot of purees and mushes and you're now asking about and you actually just don't have the opportunity to make food where you are. What do you take, what should we do?

**Kath Megaw:** So you can either, you can go to your local shop and you get jars or you get pouches or you get little sachet and those actually do work quite well for traveling because you can just use what you need and then you will obviously, if you can’t put it in a fridge or something, you will then need to obviously discard it.

**Meg Faure:** Kathy, lets, before you actually go on there, let's talk about that because that's such an important issue is being given, first of all giving parents’ permission to use convenience foods, that's great, absolutely tick that box. But not all convenience foods are made equal. So, could you just talk us through what a mom should be looking for when she's choosing a convenience food to take with her, she's one of those moms who wants to prepare all her baby's food at home, but she needs her convenience foods. What does she look for on the label?

**Kath Megaw:** Yeah, so and this is really for, so first you obviously don’t want any nasties in any of your convenience foods. So it shouldn't have a lot of preservatives, a lot of sugar added to it, it's not necessary especially in your early weaning baby and then it needs to be in a sealed container so your jar foods do have good nutrition in them even though they seem to be on the shelf, It's the process by which they were developed and the way they were cooked and the heat in method. So, it’s very similar heat in method that's used like with UHT milk that you buy in the box. So, it protects to all the bacteria, it's heated to very, very high level and then it's cooled down very, very quickly.

**Meg Faure:** Does that not kill the nutrients?

**Kath Megaw:** No, it only kills vitamin C but when you cook your baby's food you also kill vitamin C and I think that's really important to remember. It's really your water soluble, heat resistant, your heat labor vitamins that are going to be affected, which is predominantly vitamin C, vitamin A and your vitamin Bs are very stable, and they will be part of that and it will be absolutely fine. So, your vitamin C is something which is very difficult to preserve if you are preparing ahead of time cooking it, even if you peel yourself an orange and eat it two hours later you've lost half the vitamin C, so vitamin C just look at it and it disappears. So, to get that in, just keep giving your baby fresh fruit and do that on the road but your protein, your calories, your fats, all of that, if it's part of the original food that was made to go into the jar, the nutrients will still be present in the jar pouch and sachet.

And so, heat treatment is probably the safest way to preserve the food. What worries me is foods that get made in facilities that don't have legislation around them that haven't checked by health standards. There's a lot that goes into producing baby foods and it's not very well regulated specifically in South Africa. We don't have very good regulation and basically anyone can sell baby food. You don't have to have a license to senate like you have to have in some countries. You don't have to have any health inspector come to your facilities like you have to have in some countries, at the moment it's a huge market that's evolving with very little legislation and regulation around it.

**Meg Faure:** Yeah, Kath you and I have been at the rock face of this, I don't know for mom's information, Kath and I actually developed a weaning product called Weaning Sense. It's available through UCOOK and it is a fabulous food range for little ones. It is super highly regulated and tested and what is being quite distressing to watch is how many, I want to call them mom and pop shops where moms are kind of making the food in her kitchen and are then selling it either through clinic sisters' rooms or even actually through some big retailers. And it's really scary because we know for a fact that it's not going through the all the hoops that we know the baby food needs to go through, so a really reputable supplier is something that's really important when you're going to pick those convenience foods as well.

**Kath Megaw:** Hundred percent.

**Meg Faure:** And Kathy you've mentioned, I mean we went into this in a lot of detailing reading weaning sense, for those of you who want more information on how to read labels, go and get your weaning sense book out, it's actually in one of our chapters. But Kathy you mentioned there that there are a couple of things that on the labels that you don't want to be feeding to your babies; things like e-numbers as an example of preservatives. Are there anything else that should be red flags for moms as they're buying these convenience foods?

**Kath Megaw:** Yes obviously, if there's high levels of sodium or high levels of sugar, it's really not necessary to be included. However, I can definitely rest assure you that all our regulated products out there that are in jars or being heat treated like our product for example, or any other products that are reputable, the sass through your stores, those are very well regulated with regards to what is allowed and learned. That's the other thing that worries me a lot about your kind of mom and pop shop is that, to go and get actual nutrient nutrition tables on what's actually in the food costs a lot of money and the reliability of some of the products that are out there at the moment is a big concern for me. Especially as a professional trying to do very technical medical diets and then needing to use those foods and I can't actually get the nutritional information attached. Yeah. But it's really difficult.

**Meg Faure:** Very interesting. I think anecdotally back to a story when we talk about going out and about with little ones, so one of the options is obviously that you take your convenience foods with you that I you've mentioned, but there are actually other options and I'm thinking back to a story that we used to do with our little ones and that was that and this, you know, I mean I had three children and my third one was spaced quite far away from the older two and so with the older two we'd often go to the spur because of course that's where you go when you've got kids. Like oh, goodness my kids are old enough I don't have to deal with the noise of the spur but wow it was a favorite when my little ones were little.

So, we used to take Emily, our youngest to the Spur and what I used to do Kath, is I used to go to that, they had that, I don’t know if they still have it, that Veggie bar and I used to go and get either the spinach, the cream spinach or the creamed butternut, I'd take a little block of either butter or cream cheese from the bar or else take one along with me in my nappy bag and kind of mash it in to give it some nice kind of dairy or protein in into the butternut. Is that the type of thing you can do? I mean can you be as kind of fly by night? Is it?

**Kath Megaw:** Yeah, I think going to restaurants these days, you definitely can. So if your child doesn't have allergies and you're not worried about that and you've tried kind of dairy and you've tried Nuts, then you can definitely do that. I wouldn't recommend that if you haven't introduced to a child yet to one of those allergens like Nuts and that because you can't be a hundred percent guaranteed, but you can definitely do that. And I've even had it at restaurants I remember even asking a restaurant to just bring me some veggies and they meshed it for me and we fit it at the table. That's definitely durable when you eating out.

**Interlude**

If you enjoy my podcast, I would like to share one of my favorite podcasts with you, The Honest Hour. Christina Mazak is mom to two boys and a third little boy on the way. She's an American expat living in Cape Town South Africa since 2008 and decided to start sharing her experiences in parenting since 2017, having grown up in a dysfunctional family environment in her own childhood, which led to her adoption at the age of 10. Christina is passionate about finding purpose and presence in parenting as well as exploring our own opportunity for healing and personal growth as we navigate the world of parenting our own children. Christina believes in ending the trauma cycle and that in parenting our own children we can learn how to reparent ourselves. So, pop on over to Christina's podcast, The Honest Hour.

**Meg Faure:** And what about now when we are traveling, I mean I did an episode on travel on the podcast, people can go in the night for that one and we had a look at feeding your little one in the car or on a plane. I mean that's always a bit of a nightmare because it's going to probably end up in the car seat or on the floor of the plane and what sort of snacks should we be taking for on the go meals and snacks while we traveling?

**Kath Megaw:** So that's where I really think the pouches and **sachets** that you get these days are so wonderful and if you're a mom that really loves to even cook yourself, you can even buy pouches that you can fill yourself and with your food and it seals nicely and it cooks. The nice thing is for your little toddler, they can just sit and suck their pouch so it's bit least messy for your baby. You can just spoon it spoon by spoon onto the pouch, then pop the lid on. So, it's definitely helpful for their traveling when your baby is still in the pureed phase or you are toddler just quickly going to have something nutritious on the go and you get breakfast ones and you get lunch and you get snack ones and different options like that. So, I think those are definitely one of the most convenient and they don't have to be refrigerated until they've been opened and then you might have to discard one or two if they didn't finish it really.

And then, obviously if your child's a bit older, navigating like some of your finger biscuits, some of your teething biscuits, some really nice ranges out there that they can do. Little handheld veggie straws, little coconut rolls, they some of my favorite because they're dissolvable so you literally bite on them and they're just dissolving in the mouth, which is wonderful. The chop with the child who can't chew adequately yet and you don't want them choking while you flying or on the train or something like that. So those are lovely just to pack into your pack and give them as little snacks as well.

**Meg Faure:** Absolutely fabulous, you've kind of opened up a little Pandora's box for me Kath and that's the par foods. So I hear you that those pouches are wonderful because we can squeeze it onto a spoon for babies and our toddlers can squeeze them into their mouths when we are on the go and we're traveling. However, I do think that lazy parenting, we are all the best at it to, I certainly wear that hat because you take the path of least resistance, but I do think that sometimes we can fall into the trap of just giving our little ones the pouches to just suck on without giving them solid meals and do you as a dietician have concerns around those pouches for any of those reasons? And also, maybe the amount of sugar that's in them, particularly if you look at the fruit ones and if that's the snack of choice for your little one all the time is an obesity risk. Do you have any concerns or is this something that is always a good thing?

**Kath Megaw:** Yeah, I think it's very important so these are time and a place for not always say to parents, it's like takeaways. You're not going go and get pizza takeaways every single night of the week and you're not going to go and have a piece of cake and coffee every single day of the week. And that's how see parents need to really look at the pouch and the snack and thesachet options. It's really for those moments, when we travel and we are on the plane and we need the convenience or we are on the train or in the car, we need the convenience, it is so helpful. But if it's going to pull the day and that's all your toddler is wanting to have then it's a concern, with regards to the sugar, I often say even for the toddlers, you can give the younger baby pares because they don't have the sugar in it and then at least you're not giving all those extra sugars if they're having those as the norm consistently.

It's passive eating, so it's not metabolically active food because all the digestion is literally done and so your child is literally, it's almost equates to drink in fruit juice which I'm not a big fan of at all because that increases the risk of obesity. So, and similarly with the pouch because you just literally sucking it up, then it's also going to be a lot more concentrated fructose in it, increasing your risk of obesity because they tend to eat a lot more than if they were eating and chewing through pieces of fruit. So, a hundred percent, I think there is a place for it and I think it can play a helpful role at certain seasons and times like outings and going traveling. But there's definitely, I would say at home just stick with your healthy options with regards to chewing and actually navigating food.

**Meg Faure:** Excellent Kath, that is super advice and you know, I think it's so important that we don't throw the baby out with the bath water because the proverbial baby, because it would be very easy for us to say absolutely no pouches because of the risk of obesity, because of the sugar content, because of the passive eating, because we are not working our little mouth muscles, which is so important for speech. There are million reasons why pouch eating is not the best idea, but actually we know that life happens and we know that we have to travel and so there's certainly a time and place for pouch eating and travel and journeys are a good example of that. So, Kath as usual, you have given us an enormous amount of information in a very short period of time. Mums, I think that this is the go-to episode on snacks, do share it with your friends subscribe to the podcast because this is where you'll hear all of this type of fabulous information and Kath from me, thank you so much for once again being part of a mom's journey and for all that you do for the Mum's. Thanks for having me.

**Meg Faure:** Thanks Meg. Cheers.

Thanks to everyone who joined us. We will see you the same time next week. Until then, download parent sense app and take the guesswork out of parenting.