

Dried Fruit Fact Sheet: Are Dried Fruits Really a Healthy Snack?

Is dried fruit a suitable snack?

All types of fruit whether it be fresh, dried, frozen or blended in a juice are nutritious.¹ Fruit contains little fat, while containing lots of fibre, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.¹ Considering this, dried fruit could be considered a healthy choice, but it is important to remember that it is required in **smaller amounts** than fresh fruit due to its concentrated form which makes it very easy to over consume.

What does concentrated mean?

During processing, the majority of water in the fruit is removed to create the dried fruit product,¹ such as sultanas, raisins, apricots, bananas and figs. The sugar and kilojoules that remain after this processing are now far more concentrated in dried fruit than they would be in fresh fruit.¹ Some vitamin C and folate content is also lost during the drying process, although antioxidants and fibre content remains unchanged. This means dried fruit is not as nutritious as fresh fruit, although it is still a better option than lollies, sweets and chocolates¹.

Dried fruit and tooth decay

The sugar in foods and drinks we consume mix with bacteria and plaque on the teeth to produce harmful acids.² According to the Australian Dental Association⁴, chocolates and lollies are not the only high risk foods for tooth decay. The snacks listed below are generally deemed 'healthy' although they are, in fact, high in sugars that can get stuck in children's teeth, leading to harmful acid build up and increase the risk of tooth decay.⁴ Many of the foods below are considered "Discretionary Foods" (DF) and should not be offered at ECEC services.

- ❖ Dried fruit (e.g. Sultanas, Apricot, figs, pineapple)
- ❖ Biscuits
- ❖ Crackers
- ❖ Fruit juice
- ❖ Muesli bars
- ❖ Some breakfast cereals. (e.g. Froot Loops, Coco Pops, Nutrigrain)
- ❖ Canned fruit in syrup and/or juice
- ❖ Baked goods such as banana bread and muffins that are high in sugar
- ❖ Shop bought fruit bars and slices
- ❖ Sweetened yoghurt (e.g. Flavours such as strawberry, mix berry and honey)
- ❖ Flavoured popcorn (e.g. Caramel popcorn and multi colour popcorn)



How much and how often should we offer dried fruit be offered at ECEC services?

A variety of fruit should be provided, at least 2–3 different types per day and 5 different types per week⁵. **Fresh fruit** is best, although there are other alternatives such as smoothies using canned fruit, pureed fruit (unsweetened) to top natural yoghurt, or fruit kebabs. It should also be noted that serving sizes differs between fresh and dried fruit. Some examples of servings sizes are:⁵

The recommended fruit serving per day for a child aged 2-3 years old is 1 serve or 150g:

- ❖ 1 medium sized piece (e.g. apple, banana)
- ❖ 1 cup canned or chopped fruit (e.g. peaches, in natural juice not syrup)
- ❖ 2 small fruit (e.g. kiwi fruit or fresh apricot)
- ❖ 1 ½ tablespoons dried fruit (e.g. sultanas or 4 dried apricot halves) - If included on the menu, they should be offered **no more than once per week**⁵.

NOTE: It is recommended that children are be offered 50-70% of this serve size whilst at ECEC

Choking hazard:

Babies, toddlers and pre-school aged children differ in their ability to safely chew and swallow various food textures, shapes and sizes³. Dried fruit is sticky and can be hard to chew, therefore can be a choking hazard for young children. It is recommended that dried fruits are cut in half or into smaller pieces and offered with water; or, only fresh fruit is offered⁷. *Please refer to the SNAC choking fact sheet for more information on choking.*

Risks of overconsumption:

Dried fruit is a nutritious snack, however eating dried fruit regularly can lead to a risk of tooth decay³. Ways to reduce tooth decay from dried fruit⁴:

- ❖ Ideally teeth should be cleaned after eating dried fruit
- ❖ Provide children with water to rinse out their mouths
- ❖ Offer apple and cheese after a meal

Dried fruit can also provide excess kilojoules and sugar, and due to high fibre content, can lead to some gastrointestinal discomfort.

- ❖ [Dangers of Eating Too Many Dried Fruits](#)⁹

References:

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