If your kids like to snack on cookies and chips, getting them to nosh on a healthier option can be tricky — but it doesn’t have to be a hair-pulling experience. Snack bars are an easy grab-and-go choice, especially as kids head back to school and schedules get busy. But with a proliferation of possibilities (a lot of which aren’t healthy at all), it can be challenging to know which of the more nutritious options the little ones will enjoy and which ones will elicit a gag response.

With that in mind, we asked nutritionists for their recommendations for yummy and healthy snack bars that kids will actually want to eat.
How to look for a balanced bar

To ensure your snack bar is satiating as well as satisfying, start by looking for a combination of protein and healthy fat, according to registered dietitian Tracy Lockwood Beckerman. “Parents should pay less attention to the calories in the bar and more to the nutritional quality to make the best choice for their kid,” she said.

Another essential method to keep hunger at bay is ensuring protein and fiber are in good supply in your child’s snack bar. Registered dietitian nutritionist and consultant culinary nutritionist Sara Haas recommends parents always read the ingredient list when purchasing snack bars. “I recommend looking at fiber and protein — both should be at least 2 grams,” she said. “Bars made with nuts, seeds and dried fruit listed at the front are typically good options.”

For portion size, “try to stick with 250 calories or less,” RDN Barb Ruhs advised. “For a child, bars loaded with calories and fat are likely going to interfere with their appetite for eating a meal. Depending on the child’s age, younger children may need up to 1,200 calories a day if you plan for three meals, [which breaks down to] 400 per meal. Some children can’t eat that many calories at a meal, so breaking it up into smaller snacks that are about half the amount of a meal is a good metric.”

Be mindful of sugar

If you’re looking for a bar that’s tasty but also nutritious, you’ll want to be mindful of the difference between natural and added sugar. “If children overeat added sugar, this can lead to obesity and little to no provision of the nutrients needed for proper growth,” RDN Kimberley Rose-Francis said. “According to the American Heart Association, children should consume less than 6 teaspoons of added sugar daily.”

Her recommendation is to choose a snack bar with one or zero grams of added sugar and choose bars sweetened naturally.
Remember: It should taste good!

An obvious and potentially underrated suggestion came from Ruhs: “My advice as a dietitian is pretty simple — finding a bar that your child will like the taste of and enjoy eating is the first step.” With so many options popping up to have healthier ingredients, newer sources of protein and fancy additives, at the end of the day, none of that matters if your kiddo manages to trade it to a friend for Dunkaroos. “Food should be enjoyable — yes, food is fuel, but it is also part of our cultural and family connections,” she said.

This sentiment is repeated by Beckerman, who shared that mouthfeel may be critical for youngsters. “If the bar crumbles easily or feels relatively hard on the outside, its texture may be a turnoff for your kid,” she said. “If they are more of a sweet eater, aim for a chocolate or date-based bar. If they are a salty eater, go for a peanut butter or seed-based bar.”

Be wary of the latest ‘it’ ingredients

As for bars with the latest buzzy ingredient like adaptogens, nootropics or CBD, RDN Amanda Frankeny cautions that few studies have been done on the impact of these supplements on children and that parents should proceed cautiously, if at all.

“The Food and Drug Administration doesn’t approve these items for safety or quality before they’re sold,” she said. “More often than not, even though these items can be found on store shelves, more human studies are needed to determine the proper dosage of the active ingredients, ideal preparation for the expected impact, their effect when combined with various ingredients, and more.”

Here are some brands the experts approve of.
These bars are free of wheat, tree nuts, and eggs, making them a great option for children with allergies. “That’s It Fruit Bars are a tasty combination of fruits. With zero grams of added sugar and made only of fruits, this snack bar is one sure way to get more fiber and vitamins into your child’s diet,” Rose-Francis said. “They’re an acceptable replacement for the traditional fruit-flavored roll-up snack that is laced with added sugars.”

Get That’s It Fruit Bars for $17.99 (12-pack).