

Lifestyle Fact Sheet: Kids on the Go

Quite probably, the favourite children's fruit of all time is the banana. It is easy to peel, easy to chew and tastes sweet and creamy. Perfect. Banana and peanut butter sandwiches, banana jelly, banana and ice cream, or even a banana on its own all seem to hit the spot with children.

Introducing the banana

Bananas are a fruit for all ages. From the moment a child can handle solids, they can enjoy the banana. Solid foods can be introduced to infants at around 6-7 months old. At this age they have good neck and head control as well as having the tongue and mouth movements necessary for the proper swallowing of foods. An excellent first food for a young child is some mashed up banana.

The banana keeps kids healthy by providing essential vitamins and minerals. For example, the banana provides vitamin C, folate, riboflavin and is the best fruit source of vitamin B6 (a small banana provides over half of the daily B6 needs of a young child). Of course, the banana is famous for its potassium content, a mineral that helps keep our blood pressure normal.

Banana bonus

The benefits of the banana go way beyond the vitamins and minerals. The banana offers fibre to keep a child's intestines healthy and regular. The average banana provides around 3g of fibre, which is 15% of the fibre recommended for good bowel health in children. The "lunchbox" banana is the ideal size for a child at primary school.

Bananas are good for energy

In fact, they are very good for energy. That's the benefit to active children. You may have seen athletes on TV eating bananas during their sport, such as tennis players and bike riders. All of the energy in a banana comes from the carbohydrate, which is digested and then turned into muscle fuel (glucose). With children being naturally active, they need to get their carbohydrate regularly through the day. Bananas are the perfect solution, especially at sports carnivals, after swimming training or anytime when they need an energy boost.

Keeping cool

So that bananas are always available for children, it is smart to buy a few bananas that are ripe and ready for eating now as well as few bananas that are green and will ripen over the next 3-4 days. Sometimes that is not practical, so you can delay ripening by placing bananas in the vegetable crisper of the fridge. Sure, you will get some browning of the skin, but the banana inside will remain edible.

On the other hand, if you want to speed up the ripening process, place the bananas in a fruit bowl with other ripe fruit, or put the banana in a paper bag with a ripe apple or avocado. In both cases the ethylene gas produced by the banana and other ripe fruit will hasten the ripening process.

If children have easy access to bananas in the fruit bowl, you never have to coax them to eat fruit. The banana is versatile and always a winner with children.

