



Snack healthy, say docs

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Sept. 1: Six-year-old Sneha binges on snacks the whole day. The class one student barely eats her meals. Naturally her mother is worried as the snacks are devoid of essential nutrients that the child must consume in a day.

Ditto with 12-year-old Bhaskar who gets tired too often. When boys of his age are raring to go even at midnight, this fifth standard student is fatigued by noon. Doctors have warned his parents that he could be

malnourished.

In both the cases, the culprit has been snacking and the complete absence of wholesome nutritious meals. But snacking by children, especially in the cities, is a something that can't be wished away. "It is futile telling children not to eat chips or other snacks. Children eat whatever is attractive and suits their taste. It is for parents and nutritionists to ensure that the snacks are healthy and wholesome. Mothers should include nutrients like whole grain in the snack," said Dr Gomathy Shivaji, coordina-

tor, Centre for Nutrition-Counselling Research at the Women's Christian College, Chennai.

Doctors, dieticians and nutritionists at the Health Essayists Authors League (HEAL) workshop, 'Nutritional Needs For Today's Children', held recently in Chennai outlined the need for accepting snacking as a way of life for today's children. Snacking, they said, is important as it helps children meet their energy and nutrient requirements for growth and development.

"It is important for children to snack. But it should

never be a replacement for meals. Since that is happening, it is better to ensure that the snack has all the essential nutrients," Dr Shivaji said.

Experts at the workshop stressed on the importance of whole grain that, they said, reduces the risk of diabetes and is a good source of fibre.

"With dietary habits changing drastically amongst children, it is very important for us to weigh everything that the child consumes," said T.S.R. Murali, technology director at PepsiCo Foods.