

- Snack foods

START YOUR KIDS EARLY WITH HEALTHY SNACK OPTIONS

Low-sugar, low-sodium and nutrient-dense snacks for children at affordable prices

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In the past decade, more children were becoming overweight due to poor food choices, family eating habits and lack of physical activity. A firm believer that children's early development has an impact on promoting habits for life, entrepreneur Christina Lagdameo has been hands-on in encouraging her two kids to eat healthy and to be active.

The children grew up seeing their mother, a fitness entrepreneur, working out and running the now-defunct Plana Forma, a studio famous for high-intensity but low-impact workouts. Meanwhile, their father, real estate developer Cary Lagdameo, joined marathons before the pandemic. Celine, 17, performs with the International School Manila's dance club, and Paco, 13, plays soccer.

The pandemic became a blessing when the Lagdameos worked out together in their home gym which is equipped with cardio machines, weights and a huge floor space for stretches. Sometimes, they held contests among themselves, like who can hold the plank position longest. "It has been the most popular room in the house," says Lagdameo.

They enjoy outdoor activities while traveling. "Last summer, we jogged around Hyde Park in London," she says.

When schools were shut down and operated on remote learning, the children would visit their father in Davao where he heads Damosa Land, the real estate arm of the family-owned Anflo Group of Companies. Their itinerary included Agriya Park, a farm and entertainment destination in Davao del Norte, developed by Damosa.

Energy boosters

While some working women leave the feeding of the children to their nannies, Lagdameo has always been hands-on in teaching them good eating habits. She patiently cultivated their palates to eat vegetables regularly with brown rice and adlai and to balance their diet with protein sources. Pressed juices in the morning are a palatable way for youngsters to get their green leafy vegetable intake for the day. They round out their diet with healthy snacks.

Since active children need energy boosters and other important nutrients, Celine and Paco grew up eating Honest Junk, which was developed from their mother's kitchen.

Years before e-commerce became the norm, Lagdameo and her partner Celine Gabriel Lim were already pushing nourishing snacks online. Many snack bars from health shops were not only loaded with sugars and preservatives, but were also expensive. Honest Junk was way ahead of the curve in the local scene as it promoted low-sugar, low-sodium and nutrient-dense snacks for children at affordable prices. Its honesty lies in the use of local ingredients and the avoidance of coloring, preservatives, refined sugars, wheat and other processed ingredients. Honest Junk started with gummy bears infused with superfoods such as moringa, strawberry and mangosteen. Before dairy-free and wheat-free products became mainstream in the Philippines, Lagdameo worked with a nutritionist to develop gluten-free, vegan cookies with moringa. Honest Junk's vision was that each bite should add to the child's ingestion of nutrition.

Wholesome snacks help to satiate children's hunger between meals. Catering to the most sensitive diets, these snacks are packed with phytonutrients.

Friends, who are accustomed to decadent foods, comment that Honest Junk doesn't taste bland. "They can enjoy without feeling guilty," says Lagdameo.

Nature and nurture

"It's an example of nature and nurture. If you keep having it home, the kids won't crave for junk food. My daughter snacks on fruits and yogurt. When someone offers her junk food, she'll taste a little, and then she's okay," says Lagdameo.

Paco takes to power balls, banana muffins, chia bowls and chia pudding to give him energy.

While Plana Forma became a casualty of the pandemic, Honest Junk, on the other hand, flourished with better sales and offered more choices such as baked vegetable chips, artisanal chocolates and baked cheese bars. "People became more health conscious and wanted better food choices," she notes.

The business from the home kitchen expanded to the commissary. Lagdameo works with a food technician who helps maintain safety and nutrition for a bigger production volume. Aside from its website, Honest Junk can be bought from online marketplaces and brick-and-mortar stores such as Real Food, Coop and Gourmet Corner.

"Since the closure of Plana Forma in 2021, I found more time to be with my kids," says Lagdameo. She roots for her son's team in the school games and watches her daughter in a performance or dance competition. "My life is as busy as a person with a 9 to 5 job. But I have flexible hours so I'm able to adjust."