

**The Post Rock Connection**  
**Post Rock Extension District #1 Family and Consumer Sciences Column**  
**Month of June 2025**  
**By Jamie Rathbun, Family and Community Wellness Agent**

### **Are Protein Bars a Healthy Choice When On-the-Go?**

As a parent, I always look forward to summer. I anticipate a slower pace without the early mornings, homework, and all the things that the school year brings.

But I should know by now, after having kids in school for 12 years (and still more school years to go), summertime does not always bring a slower pace. Between running errands, taking kids to practices, attending camps, going to ball games, and all other events and activities, summer is often busier than the school year. During the busyness of summer, it can be hard to plan healthy meals and snacks for your family. Many of us already know that fast food is not always a nutritious choice, but alternative on-the-go options, such as protein bars, might not be the healthiest either. Although these bars can be fast and convenient, it is important to understand how to make healthier choices for our on-the-go family members.

Benefits: Although protein bars won't beat out a well-balanced meal or snack, they *can* be a healthier choice than fast food, concession stand food, and food in vending machines. We also know that a protein bar would be a better option than skipping a meal entirely. Although protein bars can be a simple and relatively mess-free option, there are some drawbacks to offering protein bars to children.

Drawbacks: Not all protein bars are created equal. While some bars may provide a rich supply of nutrients, other bars' nutritional content may be closer to that of a candy bar. Most children don't need extra protein and young athletes would actually benefit from protein-rich foods like lean meats, low-fat dairy, eggs, nuts, and seeds. Along with unnecessary protein, some bars contain extra calories and added sugars, unhealthy fats, and

extra carbohydrates that are intended for endurance adult athletes. Protein bars usually come with a high price tag too. Some bars cost up to \$5.00 each, so buyer beware!

Other Options: Instead of packing expensive, unnecessary protein bars, plan ahead to pack nutritious meals and snacks for your family. Try quick and easy foods that contain whole grains, fruits and vegetables, lean protein foods, and low-fat dairy. Easy ideas for snacks on the run include fresh fruit, such as apples and bananas with peanut butter; whole grain crackers with cheese, or a homemade trail mix with dried fruit, nuts, and whole grain cereal. When packing meals and snacks, just remember the food safety rules: 1) keep hot foods hot, 2) keep cold foods cold, and 3) don't let perishable foods stay out of a cooler for more than 2 hours. This link has great tips to review how to clean, separate, cook, and chill foods properly for food on the go.

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/keeping-bag-lunches-safe>

Here is an easy recipe that also packs well.

#### Soft Granola Bars (makes 21 servings)

##### *Ingredients*

2 eggs  
1 cup brown sugar  
1 cup vegetable oil  
2 cups regular oatmeal  
1 ½ cups whole wheat flour  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
1 cup raisins or chopped dates  
1 ½ teaspoons ground cloves  
1 ½ ground cinnamon  
¼ teaspoon salt  
1 cup nuts  
¼ cup honey

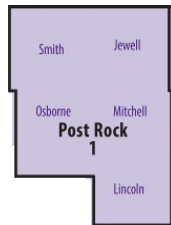
##### *Directions*

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray a 15" x 10" jelly roll pan with non-stick cooking spray. Set aside.
3. Crack eggs into a large bowl. Wash hands with soap and water after cracking raw eggs. Add brown sugar and vegetable oil, stirring until smooth.
4. Stir in remaining ingredients, except honey.
5. Spread into prepared pan.
6. Bake 17 to 22 minutes or until done. Cool.
7. In a small saucepan over medium heat, cook honey until heated through, stirring constantly. Drizzle honey on top of granola bars.

##### *Nutrition Information*

Serving size = 1/21 of recipe, Calories 230, Total Fat 12 g, Saturated Fat 1.5g, Cholesterol 25mg, Sodium 105mg, Total Carbohydrates 31g, Fiber 2 g, Total Sugars 14g, Protein 3g, Vitamin A 0%, Vitamin C 0%, Calcium 2%, Iron 6%

*The Post Rock District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith Counties. Contact Jamie Rathbun at [jrathbun@ksu.edu](mailto:jrathbun@ksu.edu) or by calling 785-524-4432. Stay connected with “Post Rock Extension” on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Our website is [www.postrock.ksu.edu](http://www.postrock.ksu.edu).*



### Post Rock Extension District #1

**Beloit Office** 115 S. Hersey Beloit, KS 67420 (785) 738-3597  
**Lincoln Office** 108 W. Lincoln P.O. Box 8 Lincoln, KS 67455 (785) 524-4432  
**Mankato Office** 307 N. Commercial Mankato, KS 66956 (785) 378-3174  
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