

Smarter Snacking

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Learn how snacks affect your overall diet and how to select healthful snacks that meet your dietary needs.

Snacks are the foods we eat outside of a structured meal setting. According to the USDA Food Surveys Research Group, over the last 30 years the average number of snacks consumed per day by adults has doubled. The percentage on any given day rose from 59 to 90 percent. Snacking by adolescents has also significantly increased, going from 61 to 83 percent over the last 30 years. Snacks provide, on average, about one-fourth of daily calories. Snacking more often throughout the day is associated with consuming more calories. For many, the snack foods and beverages contributing the most calories aren't the most nutritious options.

However, snacking can be part of a healthy eating plan. Healthy snacks provide lots of nutrition with fewer calories (*Figure 1*). The difference between unhealthy and healthy snacking is a choice.



Figure 1. Fresh fruits and vegetables, along with whole grains and low-fat dairy, can provide healthy, low-calorie snacks.

Tips to Increase the Nutritional Value of Snacks

Snacks can nourish your body with energy and fill nutritional gaps with the right choices. Use the following tips to choose snacks that will contribute to a healthful eating plan.

1. **Select snack foods from the MyPlate food groups:** (1) vegetables (2) fruits (3) whole grains (4) low-fat or fat-free dairy and (5) lean protein. Snacks from these foods contribute more nutritional value and usually fewer calories than foods high in sugar and fat.
2. **Develop a snack plan:** To keep snacking under control, plan what to eat, how much, and when to eat a snack. Planned snacking reduces the likelihood of overeating on not-so-healthy foods at a fast-food restaurant, vending machine, or convenience store.
3. **Use snacks to supplement daily meals:** To keep snacks from replacing meals, avoid eating snacks within one hour of meals.
4. **Keep nutritious snacks handy:** Have nutritious snack choices available. Research shows that snacks are selected often because of availability. If your cupboard is full of cookies, chips, and candy, it's easy to make them your snack. Rather, if fresh fruits are washed and vegetables cleaned, they become an easy choice. Have healthy snacks portioned into snack-size bags or containers for “on-the-go” days. Snacks purchased with the weekly groceries can keep costs to a minimum and nutrition to a maximum.
5. **Eat snacks only when hungry:**

Thirst is often misinterpreted as hunger, so it is important to drink plenty of water during the day. Every person has varying needs when it comes to snacking, depending on the amount of physical activity, portion sizes at meals, and work schedule.

 - Adults may not need snacks between meals if they are inactive during the work day.
 - Elderly adults and toddlers may have difficulty eating large meals because of stomach capacity, and may do well with several small snacks throughout the day.
 - Children and teens are more likely to need snacks because of their growth and the amount of time they are physically active. Plan ahead for children's snack needs to avoid last-minute unhealthy snacking decisions.

Make Smarter Snacking Easy

This chart provides ideas for planning snacks. Not all the choices are appropriate for your situation, but they may provide a starting point for healthy snack planning. The best snack foods are those in which fat or sugar is not the largest source of calories. Choose foods from at least two food groups.

<i>Fruits</i>	<i>Vegetables</i>	<i>Dairy</i>	<i>Protein</i>	<i>Whole Grains</i>
<p>Cut-up fruit or buy pre-cut fruit like pineapples or melons.</p> <p>Try fresh berries or grapes.</p> <p>Carry packaged dried fruit; ¼ cup is equivalent to ½ cup fresh fruit.</p> <p>Top plain low-fat yogurt with berries or sliced fruit.</p> <p>Enjoy frozen juice bars (100% juice) rather than high-fat dessert bars.</p> <p>Buy fruit canned in fruit juice rather than syrup.</p>	<p>Use low-fat salad dressing as a dip for fresh broccoli, red peppers, carrots, yellow squash, or cauliflower.</p> <p>Make a salad with five colors of in-season vegetables such as baby carrots, shredded red cabbage, or spinach leaves.</p> <p>Cut up vegetables right after grocery shopping and keep in a clear container in the refrigerator.</p> <p>Pack a pouch of pea pods in your pocket.</p>	<p>Drink a glass of milk; switch gradually to fat-free milk – first try 2% fat, then 1% fat, and finally fat-free (skim).</p> <p>Eat fat-free or low-fat yogurt as a snack.</p> <p>Make a dip for fruits or vegetables with yogurt and minced herbs.</p> <p>Blend fruit and yogurt for a smoothie.</p> <p>Choose low-fat or fat-free string cheese.</p> <p>Combine cottage cheese with diced fruit or vegetables and herbs.</p>	<p>Spread a mini-bagel with cream cheese or peanut butter.</p> <p>Peel a hard-cooked egg.</p> <p>Cube ham or another lean meat.</p> <p>Heat miniature meatballs.</p> <p>Make an open faced or closed sandwich; cut in a fun shape.</p> <p>Spread peanut butter on apple slices or a firm vegetable.</p> <p>Eat bean dip with celery.</p> <p>Carry a handful of low-salt nuts in a small bag.</p>	<p>Snack on ready-to-eat, whole grain cereals.</p> <p>Try 100% whole-grain snack crackers.</p> <p>Choose popcorn, a whole grain, made with little or no added salt and butter.</p> <p>Bake cookies or other treats with whole-grain flour or oatmeal.</p> <p>Toast whole-grain bread and spread with 100% applesauce or peanut butter.</p> <p>Sprinkle granola on mixed fruit.</p>

2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans

Balance Calories with Physical Activity to Manage Weight

- Eat a variety of nutritious snacks from the food groups while ensuring you avoid eating too many calories at one snacking period.
- Avoid the rut of always selecting the same snack. Try to find a variety of healthy snacks that satisfy your hunger and taste preferences while nourishing your body.
- Avoid eating snacks out of boredom, frustration, or loneliness; try physical activity instead.
- Be physically active at least 30 to 60 minutes a day on most days of the week.

Food Group Favorites

- Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables to help get the full range of vitamins, minerals, and fiber needed to stay healthy. Whole fresh fruits, dried fruits, and packaged pre-cut vegetables are easy snacks to carry along.
- Eat at least three ounces of whole grains per day. Whole grains provide an important source of fiber. A whole grain needs to be the first ingredient listed on the food label. Snack on whole grains such as popcorn, low-

fat granola bars, brown rice cakes, snack mixes made with whole-grain cereal, or low-fat yogurt topped with whole-grain cereal.

- Consume three cups per day of fat-free or low-fat dairy, which are needed for healthy bones and cardiovascular function.
- Eat a variety of lean protein. Examples of protein include meat, poultry, seafood, beans, eggs, nuts, and seeds.

Limit Sugar, Sodium, and Saturated Fats

- Read the label of prepackaged snack foods such as cookies, crackers, chips, cakes, and microwave popcorn to choose those without solid or *trans* fats, and with less added salt and sugars.
- Limit sweetened beverages such as pop and fruity drinks since they add many calories and sodium, with little or no nutrients.
- Keep daily sodium intake to less than 2,300 mg/day (about 1 teaspoon of salt). Reduce intake to 1,500 mg/day (about ½ teaspoon) among those 51 years and older, and those of any age who are African American or have hypertension, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease.

Especially for Kids

Snacks can help supply the nutrients needed for children's optimum development. Exposing children to a variety of foods at early ages helps them to accept more food choices. Have a low cupboard and a crisper drawer in the fridge filled with healthy snacks so hungry kids can help themselves. Important nutrients that many children need more of include calcium, vitamin D, fiber, and potassium.

Snacks are a regular part of the day in child-care homes, preschools and child-care centers. Snack time also is a time for social interaction and a time when children can learn to enjoy new foods.

UNL Extension and Educational Media have created "Snack Planet," a new iPad app available online through the iTunes Store. Snack Planet is a game developed to promote the benefits of healthy snacking and exercise <http://real.unl.edu/iOS/SnackPlanet/>.

Snacks for Kids Checklist

- _____ Does it look, smell, and taste good?
- _____ Does it provide vitamins and minerals?

- _____ Can it be chewed and swallowed without choking? (See *choking hazards*.)
- _____ Can fingers be used to eat it?
- _____ Is it different from yesterday's snack?
- _____ Is it fun to eat?
- _____ Can kids help make the snack or make it themselves?

Choking Hazards — Do not give these foods to children under 2 years of age.

- *Hard to chew*: nougat candy, nuts, peanuts, popcorn, and solid meat
- *Slippery and smooth*: hard candy, whole grapes
- *Coin-shaped*: carrot coins, hot dog

Snacks That Work

Vending machines at work or treats brought by co-workers can leave you with food choices that are high in fat, sugar or salt. Think ahead and make your own snack packs for work by choosing foods from the snack chart on page 2 and taking them along to your workplace. Use a cool pack for refrigerated items. Make your snacks work for you by choosing healthy foods.

Snack Recipes

Abbreviations: C is cup, T is tablespoon, t is teaspoon, g is gram, mg is milligram

Funny Face Pizza

(Recipe source: Wheat Foods Council, www.wheatfoods.org)

Ingredients:

- 4 Whole-grain English muffins, split
- ½ C Pizza sauce
- ¾ C Low-fat shredded mozzarella cheese
- 2 C Assorted vegetables of choice (red, yellow, or green pepper, celery, carrots, olives, tomatoes, zucchini, broccoli, mushrooms, red onion)

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Lightly toast English muffins in toaster or under broiler.
3. Arrange on a baking sheet and spread each muffin with ¼ of sauce.
4. Then top with cheese.
5. Cut vegetables into shapes for eyes, nose, and mouth.
6. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes until cheese melts.

Nutrition Facts:

Makes eight servings, one-half English muffin per serving. Nutrition content varies with toppings. With sauce and cheese, each serving has 105 calories, 3 grams (g) fat, 15 g carbohydrate and 2.5 g fiber.

Pumpkin Pudding

(www.kidsacookin.ksu.edu)

Ingredients:

- 1 Can (15-ounce) pumpkin
- ½ t Pumpkin pie spice
- 1½ C Low-fat milk
- 1 Package (3.5-ounce) instant vanilla pudding (could use sugar-free)

Directions:

1. In a large mixing bowl, mix pumpkin and pumpkin spice together with a wooden spoon.
2. Slowly stir in milk and mix well.
3. Add instant pudding mix and stir slowly for about one minute until it thickens.
4. Refrigerate until serving time.

Nutrition Facts:

Makes six servings, ¾ cup each. One serving made with regular instant pudding provides 110 calories, 1 g fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 3 g protein, 24 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber, 270 mg sodium.

Five Foods Trail Mix

Ingredients:

- 2 C Whole-grain cereal (O's, popcorn, old-fashioned oatmeal, brown rice, wheat puffs, etc.)
- ½ C Canned whole beans (garbanzo, navy, pinto, black, etc.) or already baked wasabi peas
- ½ C Dried fruit (raisins, craisins, blueberries, cherries, apricots, etc.)
- ¼ C Nuts (slivered almonds, peanuts, walnuts, pecans, cashews, etc.) *Optional*.
- 2 T Non-instant powdered milk (or grated Parmesan, Romano, or Asiago cheese, etc.)
- 1-2 t Seasoning powder (taco blend, lemon pepper, parsley, cinnamon, cardamom, etc.)
- Canned butter spray

Directions:

1. Rinse and dry with paper towels the canned beans. Spread on a large jelly roll pan and bake for 20 minutes at 350°F. Let cool.
2. On top of the beans, layer the cereal and dried fruit. Spray very lightly with butter spray.
3. In a small bowl, combine milk powder and seasoning.
4. In a large bowl or zip bag combine cereal, beans, and dry fruit. Sprinkle milk and seasoning on ingredients as you stir or shake bag.
5. Place a ¾ cup serving in a snack bag for a snack “on-the-go.”

Nutrition Facts:

One ¾ cup serving provides 222 calories, 6 g total fat, 2 mg cholesterol, 7 g protein, 32 g total carbohydrate, 4 g fiber, 205 mg sodium.

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Resources

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