



Good for You!

A Fresh Look at Snacks

From an early age, many of us were told to eat three meals a day and avoid eating between meals. But, according to the USDA, most people ignore that advice. Americans now eat more than two



snacks per day and get 25% of their total calories from snacks. Snacks are an everyday routine for many people.

Snacks can play an important role in a healthy diet. Unfortunately, snack choices are often high sugar, high fat foods like candy bars, chips, cookies or whatever is handy from a vending machine or convenience store. These foods may taste good and are easy and familiar, but they give us lots of calories with few nutritional benefits.

We can choose to turn snacks into something more than just a “grab and go” eating habit. With a little planning and some well-chosen ingredients, a mere snack turns into a healthful mini meal.

Why Eat a Snack?

Many experts recommend eating several smaller meals through the day instead of three meals. By eating more frequently, blood sugar levels remain stable, replacing that mid-afternoon rundown feeling with sustained energy all day. Eating a healthful snack between meals can prevent you from becoming overly hungry and overeating when meal time finally does roll around.

Rethink Your Drink

Thirst is often mistaken for hunger, so drinking plenty of water throughout the day may help control the urge to eat. Water is the best choice to satisfy thirst. Sports drinks, energy drinks, carbonated beverages and fruit drinks are often considered as snacks themselves. All of these beverage choices contain large amounts of sugar and calories, and may do little to satisfy hunger or thirst.

Many people find it difficult to eat all the recommended food group servings at meal times. Snacks of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products and lean protein foods are a great way to fill in the gaps in your healthful diet.

Children benefit from eating small amounts more often through the day, so providing a healthful snack to kids can help them “make it” to the next meal.

It’s important to remember that snacks are optional. Not everyone gets hungry between meals. If you aren’t hungry between meals, you don’t have to eat.



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Why Are You Eating?

Although snacking can provide nutritional benefits and can easily be included in a healthful diet, there is a difference between eating out of hunger and eating mindlessly for other reasons.

Learn to pay attention to your body's hunger cues and understand why you are eating. Are you really hungry or are you eating because you are bored, sad, anxious, or just because food is handy? Tackle these triggers by indulging in another source of comfort, relaxation or stress relief, such as reading a book, calling a friend, walking in the park, or doing some other activity you find enjoyable.

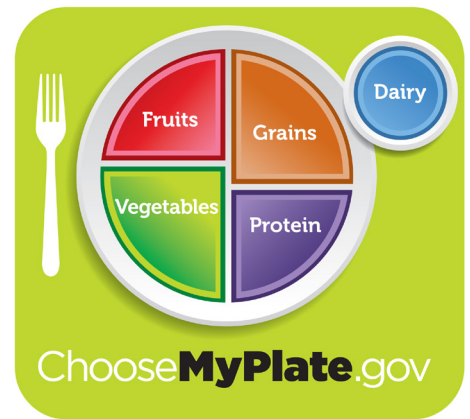
If you truly are hungry, don't deprive yourself! Ignoring hunger now can cause you to overeat later on. If your stomach is telling you it needs food, listen to it. Make a conscious effort to learn if your "hunger pangs" are real. Learn to eat based on hunger rather than habit.

Plan Your Snack Attack

Keep snacking healthful by planning what to eat, when to eat and how much to eat. Select foods from the MyPlate food groups. Read food labels to help choose foods that give more of the things you need, such as potassium, fiber, vitamins A and C, calcium and iron, and less of the things you should limit, such as saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, sodium and added sugar.

Pay attention to serving sizes. Portion out healthful foods, take them along so your healthy choice is the easy choice, and enjoy! Here are some simple, healthful snack ideas:

- Almonds and walnuts. Be sure to select the unsalted, unsweetened varieties.
- Fresh fruits such as bananas, apples, oranges, grapes, strawberries, etc.
- Whole-grain crackers or mini bagels with hummus or peanut butter. Read the Nutrition Facts Label carefully. The first ingredient should read "whole wheat" or "whole grain" instead of "enriched."
- String cheese.
- Plain popcorn. Popcorn is a whole grain food!
- Low-fat yogurt.
- Carrot sticks or other cut-up veggies.
- Low-fat cottage cheese with fresh fruit.
- Half a whole wheat pita with sliced turkey.
- Hard boiled eggs.
- Trail mix. Make your own with our recipe!



Basic Trail Mix

9, ½ cup servings

Ingredients:

- 2 cups toasted oat cereal
- 1 cup almonds, unsalted
- 1 cup small pretzels
- ½ cup raisins
- ¼ cup small chocolate candies (optional)

Directions:

Combine all ingredients in a large mixing bowl and stir gently. Serve in individual bags or cups.

Nutrition Facts (without candy)

One serving provides: 190 calories, 9g total fat, .5g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 240mg sodium, 25g total carbohydrate, 3g dietary fiber, 6g sugars, 6g protein

Nutrition Facts (with candy)

One serving provides: 220 calories, 10g total fat, 1.5g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 240mg sodium, 29g total carbohydrate, 3g dietary fiber, 10g sugars, 6g protein

Adapted from Tanda Kidd & Katie Hamm, *Move Into Health: What's in a Snack*, Kansas State University, October 2011

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This material is funded by USDA SNAP. USDA is an equal opportunity employer and provider. SNAP provides food assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. For information, call 1-888-369-4777.

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