



ASK THE DIETITIAN

Healthy Snacking

Q. Should I give up my favorite snacks?

A. You don't have to give up your favorite treats like cookies, candy or chips even though they may be higher in calories, fat or sodium. Knowing how to indulge without overindulging is the key to smart snacking. Since treats are not everyday foods, you need to place limits on how often you 'treat' yourself to your favorite snacks. Many smart snackers opt for once or twice a week. Be aware of the number of calories that's right for you and the number of calories your snack favorites contain, this helps you to occasionally include that chocolate cake or chocolate chip cookie in small amounts without going over the limit. Lastly, follow the credo - everything in moderation, and enjoy your snacks!

Q. How can I help my family get smart about snacking?

A. People who snack when bored, in response to stress or instead of eating healthy meals turn snacking into an unhealthy habit. Those who snack only when hungry in order to curb their appetites in between meals tend to follow smart snacking habits. You can become a role model who helps your family to snack smart. Never eat out of a large package or large container, this leads to over snacking. For help with portion control, buy single serve packages or portion snacks from large packages into a small re-sealable bag or a bowl. Keep treats out of sight and work with your family to decide how often favorite treats are served. Keep healthy snacks in convenient locations so that they are on hand when you have a snack attack. Place them in the fruit bowl on the kitchen table or the front of the refrigerator at home. Carry them in your handbag or store them in your desk drawer at work. Make sure that your kids bring healthy snacks in their backpacks. Healthy snacking is a part of your daily meal plan.

Q. I'm trying to lose weight do I have to give up snacks?

A. Snacks can be a part of healthy eating even when you're trying to lose weight. To lose weight, you must burn more calories than you eat and drink regardless of whether the calories come from meals or snacks. Between meal snacks can satisfy your immediate hunger as well as help to prevent overeating at the next meal so they can actually help your weight loss plan. For dieters and non dieters alike, the most important snack time is usually late afternoon. This is the longest time period between meals, and it's also the time of day when many people need a 'pick-me-up'. Choosing lower calorie nutritious snacks with fiber, such as apples, bananas, or your favorite fruit, can help you to feel full longer. Also, it's a good practice to avoid snacks after dinner. For a variety of reasons, many people tend to over indulge at that time of day.

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Q. How many times should I snack during the day?

A. Healthy in between meal snacks, once or twice a day can satisfy, nourish and help prevent you from eating too much at your next meal. Some people snack frequently and others never snack. While snack patterns vary, it's easier to stick to a reasonable snack routine if you eat regular meals and snack only if you're hungry. When you don't eat regular meals it's easy to overdo the snacks as you try to satisfy your hunger by substituting meals with snacks.

Q. I don't have a sweet tooth, so I tend to eat a lot of salty snacks, which salty snacks are the best?

A. If you like salty snacks, such as cheese and crackers, pretzels, salted nuts, or chips, don't forget to check labels for more than calories and fat. Make sure that your favorite snacks have around 300 milligrams of sodium per serving. Since there is sodium in so much of what we usually eat, including snacks, most Americans get almost twice the amount of sodium recommended for health, even if they don't use the salt shaker.

Q. There are so many snacks to choose from, it's difficult to tell which ones are best for me and my family.

When all is said and done, the best snacks should be nutritious and lower in calories so you don't exceed your recommended daily calories. The easiest way to do this is to make sure that your snacks are 200-250 calories or fewer, lower in fat and sodium. Everyday, in-between meal snacks should be chosen from the healthy major food groups. Here are some examples.

- Three cups of air popped popcorn sprinkled with grated parmesan cheese
- One cup of tomato soup and five whole grain crackers
- Small turkey and cheese sandwich on a whole grain dinner roll
- Cinnamon-raisin mini bagel with one tablespoon of peanut butter
- English muffin veggie pizza (with low fat mozzarella cheese and diced veggie topping)

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Q. There are snacks everywhere at work, from candy jars at the reception desk to cookies at meetings; it's difficult to steer clear of unhealthy snacks. How can I resist the temptation?

A. Our environments are filled with food and there is no easy way to pass up treats every single time. While you may not be able to remove so many temptations, start with communication. Ask your co-workers for a helping hand; suggest that they bring in treats only for special occasions. Encourage them to place the treats in a less accessible location, since studies show that the farther you have to travel for a snack the less likely you are to indulge. Another strategy that helps is to plan ahead. Keep a supply of healthy snacks handy so that you do not need to graze on what's available in the break room or the reception area. Items that can be stored easily in your workspace include; whole grain crackers, single serve instant oatmeal packages, dry cereal or cereal bars, peanuts, sunflower seeds and whole fruit like bananas, pears or apples. If you attend meetings where snacks are served, choose from the fruit platter. If you must give in to your sweet tooth share a cookie with a coworker.

Q. What is a healthy snack?

A. Healthy snacks can include food from all of the major food groups. Healthy snacks are free of trans fats, about 200-250 calories or fewer, and lower in total fat, saturated fat, sodium and sugar. Air popped popcorn or whole grain pretzels are good examples. Fruits and vegetables are ideal snacks because most of us don't eat enough of them and they are not only lower in calories and fat than most other snacks; they are also filled with vitamins and fiber. Some snacks like nuts and seeds although higher in fat are considered "good snacks" because they contain "heart healthy" fats. But they are high in calories so eat them in small portions (about a handful). Larger portions can add extra calories and unwanted weight gain.

Q. I get conflicting advice about the best workout snacks; help me separate fact from fiction?

A. First, it's important to know that if you have a healthy diet, you usually don't need a snack to keep your energy levels up, especially if you're working out for less than an hour. If you do participate in intense training that involves strenuous exercise for more than 60 minutes, such as preparation for a marathon you may need a healthy snack that includes carbohydrates and protein to build or replenish your energy. While energy bars are convenient, whole foods like peanut butter with bagel slices or bananas are ideal snacks before or after your workout. Try apples and low fat string cheese, tuna on whole wheat bread, or hummus and pita.

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Q. I'm told that growing teens need extra calories but my kids seem to be snacking all the time? What can I do to help?

The number one thing you can do to help is to try to get your teenager to eat well at mealtimes. Teenagers are at an age when they have more freedom to choose. They sometimes choose to skip meals, eat on the run, or avoid certain foods altogether. These behaviors may all contribute to a combination of too many snacks and potentially snacking on unhealthy foods.

If breakfast at home is not always possible, make breakfast at school an option or make sure they at least have a bowl of cereal with milk and a banana. Pack an easy to carry mid morning snack such as apples, granola bars, or whole grain pretzels.

Teens tend to run into trouble with over snacking or unhealthy snacks after school. They graze on chips while enjoying sweetened soda, cookies or candy. Be prepared with already cut-up fruit, whole grain crackers and cheese, fruit & yogurt smoothies, skim or low fat milk, and peanut butter & jelly sandwiches to get the edge off until dinner.

Q. I have given up on stocking healthy snacks at home because I always end up throwing out bad fruit that never gets eaten. How can I encourage my family to eat more fruit as snacks?

A. Healthy snacks will not go to waste if you plan ahead. Start with the basics, keep cut fruit and veggies in a transparent container in the front section of the refrigerator so that they're ready to eat and easily accessible. Favorites include cantaloupe, apples, red or green peppers, celery sticks, carrots, and broccoli or cauliflower florets. Don't forget to also have dip handy especially if you want kids to reach for fresh fruits or veggies. Fruity yogurts, peanut butter and hummus make tasty healthy dips. Kids love to dip. Already washed grapes are another ready to eat favorite. Making a batch of smoothies is a great way to use up fruit before they get to the point when you need to discard them, especially bananas. Pull some frozen strawberries from the freezer, add some low fat milk, low fat yogurt and over ripe bananas, blend with ice and enjoy.

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Q. With so many options to choose from in my supermarket snack aisle, what should I be looking for on a nutrition label?

A. Calories, fat and sodium are the main nutrients on the label to watch for. Let's start with calories - since snacks should be a part of your daily between-meal routine, they should be lower in calories than your main meals. Many treats in the snack aisle can be considered 'empty calories' since they are rarely ever a good source of vitamins or minerals. So check the label for 'calories' and 'calories from fat'. Make sure that each serving is no more than 200-250 calories and most of the calories do not come from fat. Also, many items in the snack aisle are referred to as 'salty snacks' so look for sodium on the label to make sure that each serving contain around 300 milligrams of sodium or less. Some snacks are not just empty calories; they contain added nutrition like protein, dietary fiber, vitamins and minerals. Reading labels can help you trade up from empty calorie snacks. Look for snacks with at least two of the following: 5 grams of protein, 1 gram of dietary fiber, 10% daily value for Vitamins A, Vitamin C, calcium or iron.

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