
Smart Snacking

Plan Ahead

Purchasing good snacks for your needs to have on hand is half the battle. If the food requires any preparation, do that ahead of time, when you are able or have the time. Enlist help with any food preparation that is difficult for you. Keep several of your favorite, healthy snacks on hand, and you'll be prepared to enjoy at a moment's notice.

Choose Wisely

Select snacks that you will enjoy that will also contribute to your nutritional well-being. Avoid packaged snack foods, including those labeled low fat or low calorie. They are empty calories that are devoid of significant nutrients.

Slow Down

Take your time when eating, including snacks. This will help you avoid "mindless eating", when you may consume foods without even realizing it, not enjoying the taste, texture, and experience. When you can, eat with a family member or friend. Socialization is important, and can even improve digestion!

Portion your Snacks

Too much of even a healthy snack is still too much. Use appropriate portion sizes.

Snacking: Nutritional Friend or Foe?

The answer...it depends!

Many people eat between meals, usually considered "snacking". There are often reasons that snacking is good, and even encouraged. Examples:

- For those who cannot eat a lot of food at one time (feel full too quickly, small stomach capacity, or poor appetite), snacking is a necessary supplement to meals to ensure adequate calorie and nutrient intake.
- Snacking can help maintain a stable blood sugar level, and keep hunger and cravings at bay, especially when meals are spaced far apart. But to achieve this, one must eat snacks that will meet this need, especially ones with protein. Not just any food will do!
- Snacking may be a necessary addition for those who are underweight and need to gain to an appropriate range for height, age, gender, and physical activity level. Increasing total calorie and nutrient intake with well-spaced meals and snacks is better than just trying to eat more at meal times.
- Snacks can provide the necessary food to accompany medications when directions prescribe such a routine. Consult medication labels or your medical provider or pharmacist to find out the best ways to take your medication, and any limitations on specific types of foods to avoid food-drug interactions.

When is Snacking not so good?

- When snacks are not nutritious foods, and tend to "fill you up" so much that you are not hungry at meal times, they are robbing you of the opportunity to nourish your body adequately.
- If you are overweight, or need to avoid gaining weight, snacking may increase your intake so much that it causes those dreaded extra pounds, or simply that "belly fat" that is a known health risk.
- Snacks selected and purchased are often processed foods (packaged, man-made foods) that are far less nutritious than whole, fresh, natural foods. Processed foods are lacking in bioactive compounds like enzymes, antioxidants, probiotics, and other important agents in whole foods that provide health benefits beyond calories, vitamins or minerals.

You can determine what is right for you for how often, how much, and what foods you choose to eat for snacks. If you need help with this, ask your nutritionist/dietitian or health care provider.

Creative, Nutritious Snack Ideas

Take Snacks with You

When you have appointments out, take a healthy snack with you. If you are delayed, you will be prepared with a snack to help you avoid excessive hunger or low blood sugar. You'll be less tempted to give in to "junk food".

And for a special sweet treat snack that is as nutritious as it is delicious...

Avocado Chocolate Mousse

2 medium sized ripe avocados
1/3 cup raw cacao powder, or more to taste
5 fresh dates, pitted and roughly chopped
¼ cup Coconut milk, nut milk, or filtered water
1 tsp. natural vanilla extract, or pure vanilla bean powder
Pinch of unrefined sea salt
Optional: dried coconut, grated dark chocolate, or berries, to serve.

Soak the dates in the milk or water for 10-30 minutes to soften. In a food processor (or blender), add the avocado, dates, milk, vanilla and salt and cacao powder. Blend until smooth. Add more liquid if needed to facilitate blending, and scrape down the sides of the bowl a few times. Adjust ingredients to taste, adding more cacao powder if needed. Serve and garnish with your choice of toppings. Serve chilled, ¼ cup serving is plenty!

- Cheese (not processed slices, but real cheese) with whole grain crackers or bread and sliced sweet peppers
- Nuts (raw or roasted, a handful), or nut butter (2 Tbs.), with fresh apple slices
- Cottage cheese with toasted pumpkin seeds & raisins or cranberries
- Greek yogurt (1/2-1 cup) with sliced pears and roasted walnuts
- Hummus (garbanzo bean "dip"), crispy sugar snap peas and pita chips
- Refried beans (or just "smashed beans") with salsa and homemade baked corn tortilla dippers
- Guacamole with cherry tomato, or sliced tomato, dippers
- Popcorn, ideally popped fresh at home from whole kernels in some coconut oil; sprinkled with nutritional yeast and grated parmesan cheese
- Homemade trail mix, from your favorite nuts (walnuts, almonds, pecans, pistachios, filberts, peanuts), seeds (pumpkin, squash, pepitas, sunflower), and dried fruits (raisins, low sugar cranberries, cherries, blueberries, apricots). One serving is about ¼ cup; keep in a tightly covered container, in the refrigerator, to stay fresher. Remember that dried fruits are high in sugar; keep amounts small! This is very filling due to protein, high fiber, and healthy fats.
- High-protein smoothie. Almond, Coconut, or Dairy milk, scoop of protein powder, handful of nuts (or some nut butter), frozen berries, handful of fresh spinach or other greens, ice cubes...blend and enjoy!
- Fresh cut-up vegetables, whatever you like. Broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, celery, zucchini, yellow squash, bell peppers, snap peas are all easy, tasty, and popular...add a dip of "ranch seasoning" mixed in Greek yogurt; or Balsamic vinegar with olive oil; or spicy mustard in Greek yogurt with a touch of honey.
- Jerky, beef or chicken, a high protein snack that stops hunger in its tracks. There are brands that are softer and not hard to chew. (simplysnackin.com is one)
- Oatmeal muffin w/ nut butter; Whole grain toast with nut butter and honey
- Avocado slices with a sliced, hard-boiled egg
- High protein nut butter dip: 1 c. silken tofu, blended with ½ c. almond or other nut butter, vanilla and optional cinnamon. Delicious!! Dip with apple slices, celery sticks, any fruit or vegetable suitable.
- Roast canned or cooked garbanzo beans (chickpeas) sprinkled with olive oil, garlic or onion powder, turmeric or curry powder, sea salt and pepper, until crisp and crunchy! (roast in oven at 425 degrees for 10-12 minutes)

