

EATING HEALTHY SNACKS

Is it healthy to snack?

Americans say they are very concerned about nutrition. Most people understand that too much fat in their food can be a serious health problem. However, many admit that their diets are not balanced and are too high in fat and sugar. When you are rushed and hungry between meals, it is often easiest to grab a candy bar or chips and a soda. Sometimes you may even eat these types of foods for meals because they are fast and give a boost in energy without requiring the time it takes to sit down and eat a healthy meal.

The concept of eating healthier is starting to take hold, however, as we begin to see the consequences of our poor eating habits. Obesity, even among our children, is skyrocketing. We can see that we need to choose our foods more wisely, eat less, and take time to plan our meals and snacks. Snacking can be healthy and often more desirable than eating just 3 meals a day if it is done the right way.

Do some people need to snack more than others?

If meals are not oversized and snacks are usually healthy, anyone should be able to enjoy snacking. In fact, some people need to snack in order to get enough calories.

Infants and toddlers need to snack because they have such high energy demands and small stomachs.

Teenagers who are rapidly growing and developing also need to snack because they require more calories and nutrients to sustain their growth spurts.

Athletes involved in sports or endurance training need to snack to meet their increased energy demands. Carbohydrates (stored as a substance called glycogen in the liver and muscles) are used up during exercise and must be replenished.

People with very strenuous professions may perform better if they eat more often throughout the day to maintain a high energy level.

People who may not have time to sit down for a meal should snack so they don't have an energy let-down in the late afternoon.

People who don't eat breakfast should carry a snack with them so they will have the energy to focus on their work.

If you do not fit into one of the above categories, it is still OK to snack on healthy foods and an occasional treat. Just be careful to limit high-calorie, high-fat foods such as candy bars and ice cream to avoid unwanted weight gain and increased health risks.

What kinds of snacks are healthy?

Well-planned snacks can help most people reach their dietary goals. Picking snacks to complement your meals or your diet is the key to snacking. You can use snacks to reach the goal of eating foods from all food groups every day.

The 6 food groups are:

- meat, poultry, fish, dried beans, eggs
- grains
- fruits
- vegetables
- milk, cheese, yogurt
- fats (avoid saturated and trans fats)

Remember that fats, even healthy ones such as canola oil, are high in calories. You should try to keep added fat servings between 3 and 6 teaspoons a day.

Carbohydrates (grains, fruits, and vegetables) should make up at least half of your daily calories.

For example, if all you had for breakfast was a bowl of cereal with low-fat milk and you became hungry at 10 AM, pick a snack from the food groups that you missed. Because you had only 2 of the 6 food groups for breakfast, you should pick a snack from 1 or more of the other 4, like fruits, fruit juice, vegetables, peanut butter on celery, almonds, or hard-boiled eggs.

Listed below are healthy snacks that are low in saturated fat and contain about 100 to 120 calories:

- 1 medium apple or any round fresh fruit
- 18 small pretzel twists
- 10 multigrain honey graham mini rice cakes
- 18 white cheddar soy crisps
- 2 whole-grain white cheddar or butter popcorn rice cakes (natural flavor, light salt)
- 1/2 small (2 ounces) whole-wheat bagel with fat-free cream cheese
- 3 cups of air-popped or low-fat microwave popcorn
- baby carrots or broccoli and cauliflower tops with low-fat or nonfat dressings for dipping (2 cups raw vegetables and 1/2 cup nonfat creamy dressing)
- celery with nonfat cream cheese and 2 tablespoons of raisins or dried cranberries
- 1 cup (8 ounces) of 1% or nonfat (skim) milk
- 1/2 cup low-fat cottage cheese with 1/2 cup pineapple chunks
- 6 to 8 oz carton of light yogurt (sweetened with NutraSweet or Splenda)
- 4 to 5 vanilla wafers

- 5 to 6 saltine crackers (also available with low sodium)
- 1 and 1/2 graham crackers
- 1/2 cup of low-fat ice cream
- 2 tablespoons of raisins
- 1/2 cup of unsweetened applesauce
- 1 fruit roll-up
- 1 fruit juice bar

Below are healthy snacks also low in saturated fat and containing about 160 and 220 calories:

- 1 large banana or 2 medium servings of fresh fruit
- 1 cup of multigrain Cheerios with 1/2 cup nonfat milk
- 1 small whole-wheat bagel (4 ounces) with fat-free cream cheese
- 1 mozzarella cheese stick (part-skim) with 1 cup of fruit chunks and 6 to 8 low-fat, whole-wheat crackers
- 1/2 turkey and low-fat Swiss cheese sandwich with mustard
- about 6 homemade breaded and baked chicken breast nuggets
- 1 low-fat granola bar
- 4-oz fruit cup and 1 cup of nonfat milk
- 1 cup of sugar-free pudding

- 1/4 cup dried fruit
- 2 caramel corn rice cakes
- 1 cereal bar
- 1 oz of baked tortilla chips with 1/4 cup salsa
- 15 baked potato chips
- 14 animal crackers and 1/2 cup nonfat milk
- 2 fig cookies and 1/2 cup nonfat milk
- 1 cup (8 ounces) of low-fat or nonfat chocolate milk (regular sugar sweetened)

Can I eat high-fat, high-calorie foods occasionally?

Indulging once in a while is normal and healthy. People who swear off all sweets and high-fat foods can begin to crave sweets and fatty foods, which can lead to overeating. Instead, sit down and enjoy the taste and pleasant feelings you get from having the occasional high-fat, high-calorie snack. If guilt overcomes you or you want to enjoy this kind of snack more often, prepare for the extra calories and fat by skipping an extra serving of food at dinner or by exercising a little longer. The fear of having to give up a favorite snack is one of the main reasons most Americans exercise. You can have your cake and eat it, too, as long as you maintain a regular and consistent exercise program.