



Smart Snacking Strategies

Many of us were taught to eat three square meals a day with little or no snacking in between, but recent trends indicate that Americans are eating more snacks or “mini-meals” each day. Looking at this uptick in consumption, researchers have found that snacks can actually have a place in a healthy, balanced diet.

Snacking wisely can be helpful for those wanting to control their weight or lose a few pounds, but it’s important to consider snacks as part of your overall daily calorie and nutrient intake, not in addition to them.

Smart snacking between meals can help maintain weight by keeping your body fueled throughout the day. A low-calorie but filling snack can even help you lose weight by alleviating pangs of hunger before mealtime – keeping you from raiding the vending machine or overeating at mealtime.

Here are a few tips for the whole family:

- **Select minimally-processed snacks** with no more than 100-150 calories, that are low in sugar and sodium and provide a range of vitamins and nutrients.
- **Read package labels** to ensure you’re eating the recommended serving size – if that small package contains two servings but you eat it all, you’re getting twice the calories listed.
- **Aim to combine two food groups** for each snack, such as fruit or vegetable with dairy or lean protein. This helps to encourage variety in snacking, optimizes nutrient intake and can help keep hunger at bay longer. (No, cheese doodles and candy don’t count as any food group!)
- **Be mindful of what and how much you eat.** Whether you’re eating your main meal or favorite snack, slow down and take your time while eating; enjoy your food in the kitchen or at a table, away from TV or other electronics. Mindful eating leaves you feeling fuller with less food.
- **Make healthy food fun!** Get kids in the kitchen and have some fun. Use cookie cutters to make fun shapes out of cheese, or create fruit-kabobs on sticks. Try filling an ice cream cone with plain yogurt and fruit.

There are a myriad of ways to snack happy whether you make the nibbles yourself or find healthy versions at your local grocer. Here are a few quick, easy and delicious ideas:

- **Chopped or sliced veggies** such as cucumbers, bell peppers, celery and carrots are perennial favorites – use them as dippers for hummus, salsa or guacamole.
- **If you have a salty or crunchy craving,** kale chips, sweet potato chips, whole grain pretzels, nuts or sunflower seeds can do the trick. (Nuts are healthy, but fairly high in calories; limit your snack to a handful.)
- **Need a sweet lift?** Berries or other fruits are naturally juicy and satisfy the sweet tooth. Plain Greek yogurt mixed with fruit offers the creaminess we love from ice cream – with fewer calories and less fat. Or, cut up an apple or pear and spread a small dollop of peanut butter or hummus on each slice.
- **Dried fruits** such as raisins, apricots, dates and figs are deliciously sweet, too (and are convenient for grab-and-go snacks).
- **Don’t forget dairy.** Combining fruit with a few slices of cheese is satisfying, and plain yogurt makes a tangy dip for cut-up veggies or fruit.

