

Let's Talk

ABOUT YOUR HEALTH

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March is National Nutrition Month

Snack foods can be healthy with smart choices

Medical professionals often warn that snack foods can be unhealthy, upsetting dieting plans and causing a person to consume more calories than is recommended. While a number of snack foods, particularly snacks that are laden with saturated fats, sodium and many calories, can be detrimental to your health, there are plenty of healthy snacks available to men and women who know where to look.

“Self” magazine reports Americans consume 26 percent of their calories at times other than breakfast, lunch and dinner. Many fitness plans actually recommend regular snacking as part of a “grazing” mentality. Grazing, or eating several small meals per day rather than three large ones, can help keep metabolism primed and ready to burn calories. Grazing also enables a person to avoid overeating at any particular meal. But grazing on the wrong foods can be counterproductive. That’s why selecting the right snacks is important.

*** Aim for snacks that are 100 calories or less.** One-hundred calorie snacks can help you fill you up and stave off hunger pangs. While there are plenty of prepackaged 100-calorie snacks available, you can easily make your own snack packs by being conscious of nutrition labels. Measure serving sizes of healthy foods into separate containers so you’re less likely to eat more than is necessary.

*** Fill up on fruits and vegetables.** Produce can make a healthy snack because it is generally low in calories, which means portion sizes will be larger than other high-calorie foods. Many fruits and vegetables are packed with vitamins and

other nutrients, which are needed to keep a body healthy. Many also make good sources of fiber, which can help you feel satiated longer between meals.

*** Choose foods with healthy fats.** Not all fats are bad. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats lower total cholesterol and bad cholesterol in the blood. Sources of good fats include nuts, olive oil, avocado, salmon, soy, and sunflower oil. Skip foods that have high levels of saturated fats, which are mainly found in animal products. Trans fats are perhaps the worst fats to eat, as they are produced by hydrogenation to give them a longer shelf life. Avoid foods that contain hydrogenized oils.

*** Opt for snacks that mimic the texture of unhealthy snacks.** Sometimes you may crave something crunchy or a particular comfort food. Choose a crunchy whole grain cereal over potato chips. If you desire a cool, creamy treat, frozen yogurt has much fewer calories than ice cream.

*** Pack on the lean protein.** Lean sources of protein, such as slices of turkey, egg whites and soybeans, will fill you up and keep you feeling full longer than many carbohydrates. A snack of sushi can fill you up quickly. One piece of a California roll is just 30 calories and has less than a gram of fat.

*** Keep healthy snacks handy.** Always have a bag of healthy snacks handy in the event you get hungry. This way you avoid a trip through the drive-thru or a pit stop for a doughnut or another snack.

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