



Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Department of Human Services, and USDA Food & Nutrition Services Cooperating

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I wanted to share this BLT newsletter written by Carrie Brazeal, FCS County Extension, in June, 2009. The information is still relevant.

Update On Nutritious Snacks

Who snacks? Just about everyone! Snacks are very important. A nutritious snack will keep you healthy and give you the energy boost you need. It's easy to find half your daily nutritious has been replaced with empty snack calories. A planned snack can also prevent overeating.



Snack Quiz: Ask yourself:

- *Do you reach for anything close at hand to eat when you are stressed?
- *Do you know exactly what is in the vending machines at work?
- *Do you seldom have time to sit and eat a meal?
- *Have you eaten three or more "empty calorie" snacks, such as cake, a candy bar or soft drink, this week?

If you answered "yes" to one or more of these questions, you may need to plan your snacks a little better.

Benefits of Snacking

Many people can benefit from eating snacks. Growing children with tiny appetites may not be able to fulfill their energy needs with only three meals a day. Snacks can provide what may be missing from their meals. Teens are well known for their snack attacks and for good reason. They also have high energy and nutrient needs to support their growing bodies. Carefully chosen snacks can help fuel their growth. Older adults who can eat only small portions of food at a time may find it easier to maintain their health by eating

snacks in addition to their meals. Athletes of all ages have increased energy demands. They especially need energy in the form of carbohydrates, which help power exercising muscles. Snacks such as sandwiches, cereals, pasta, fruit and milk can help give athletes the additional energy they need. Snacks can offer some disadvantages as well. This depends on the types and amounts of nutrients they contain. Mindless nibbling can lead to trouble in the form of unwanted calories. Some snacks, such as potato chips, candy and other sweets, can add a lot of fat. A high-fat diet is clearly linked with chronic diseases such as heart disease and some cancers.

Removing the Myth: Snacking Myths

Despite the benefits that snacks can offer, many people think of snacks as something extra they should not eat. Here are five common myths:

Myth: Snacks are fattening.

Fact: Eating a snack during a long time between meals can take the edge off hunger, which might lead to overeating. Of course, specific snack food choices will make a difference.

Myth: Snacks spoil your appetite for meals.

Fact: Eating a small amount of food, maybe an apple or half of a sandwich, two to three hours before a meal will not spoil your appetite. But it may keep you from becoming too hungry. By eating a snack, you can be more in control of your food choices and less inclined to overeat at your next meal.



Myth: Snacking can cause cavities.

Fact: While snacks expose the teeth to food, and decay-producing bacteria more often, choosing foods that are not sticky and brushing your teeth afterward can prevent cavities.

Myth: Snacking is the same as eating junk food.

Fact: Snacking does not have to be junk food. Making better choices can help fill in the gaps in meals to complete a healthy diet.

Myth: Healthy snacking means that I can never eat potato chips again.

Fact: It is possible to eat fun foods and still follow a diet that is low in fat, but it requires a little planning. If you have a high-fat snack, you need to balance that out with lower-fat choices at other meals.

Snack Attack!

Follow these guidelines to help make snacking work for your health:

*Plan ahead so that you have the desired food at hand when you want it. You don't want to be forced to choose from limited choices in your pantry or refrigerator.

*Instead of munching absent-mindedly, make snacking a conscious activity. This means eating without doing anything else at the same time. What about snacking while watching TV? You usually overeat since you are not paying attention to what you are eating; you are just eating. It is easy to eat a bag of chips or a lot of cookies while watching TV - and not even realize it.

*Choose lower-fat snacks. Instead of chips, choose pretzels; low-fat frozen yogurt instead of ice cream; a fruit smoothie instead of a milkshake; or a frozen juice bar instead of an ice cream bar.

Healthy Snack Choices

This shopping list may help you make good snack choices when you are food shopping:

- *Whole grain cereals with low fat milk
- *Low-fat cottage cheese and fruit
- *Frozen bananas
- *Low-fat yogurt and fruit
- *Raw veggies (carrots, celery, broccoli, etc.) with low-fat dressing
- *Low-fat, reduced sugar granola bars



Here are some on-the-go portable snacks:

- *Fruit - apples, bananas, pears, etc.
- *Carrots
- *Juice boxes
- *Pretzels
- *Popcorn
- *Low-fat cheese on wheat crackers

Other Snack Other Snack Ideas

- *Apples - Slice core and serve with peanut butter.
- *Banana split - Split banana, top with two small scoops of cottage cheese or yogurt, chopped nuts or coconut and fruit.
- *Frozen bananas - Peel banana and either leave whole or cut into slices. If desired, dip in melted chocolate chips and roll in chopped nuts or coconut. Freeze individually on baking sheets until firm. Either serve or store in freezer bags. Use within one month.
- *Fruit ices - Pour fruit juice or juice mixed with yogurt into ice cube trays or small paper cups. Insert sticks or plastic spoons before juice freezes solid.
- *Fruit sticks - Thread cut fruit pieces on toothpicks. Serve immediately.
- *Celery sticks - Stuff with cottage cheese, peanut butter or cheese spread. To make ants on a log, stuff celery with peanut butter or low-fat cream cheese; top with raisins.
- *Gorp - Combine equal amounts of raisins, dried fruits, seeds, nuts, coconut and cereals (ring-shaped oat cereals work well). Use whatever sounds good to you.

Source: "Snack Attack! Take Action!", Baptist Memorial Health Care, www.bmbhc.org. "Healthy Snack Recipes and Ideas," Jill Steinberg, et al, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1997. "Snack Attack," adapted from the American Dietetic Association brochure "Snack Attacks are OK," www.nutrition.com; Carrie T. Brazeal, CFCS-County Extension Agent, McKinney, TX.

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