

Making a Healthier Trail Mix

Do you need a snack that is simple and healthy? Trail mix is a perfect snack to eat on the go or at home. It doesn't require refrigeration and it is one that you can keep tucked away in your office or packed in a bag when you need a quick snack. Be careful though, some trail mix recipes may not be as healthy. When making a homemade trail mix you can be more in control. Here are some tips to make a healthier trail mix.

Choose whole grains

Whole grain cereals low in sugar or air-popped popcorn make great additions to a healthy trail mix. Whole grains are healthier than refined grains and they are packed with nutrients including zinc, magnesium, B vitamins and fiber.

Look for products that include a whole grain stamp or whole grain ingredients such as brown rice, bulgur, oatmeal, quinoa, barley, or bulgur.

Add dried fruit

Dried fruits can help you reach your daily recommendation of fruits. A ½ cup of dried fruit can be considered as 1 cup from the Fruits group. Dried fruit is naturally sweet, so remember to avoid products with added sugar that add extra calories.

Include protein

Snacks high in protein may help provide satiety and appetite control. Include your favorite nuts and seed to add protein. My favorites are cashews, pecans, almonds and sunflower seeds. Buy them unsalted to help keep your sodium low.

Add some sweet

A lot of people like a sweet and salty trail mix. Including a dash of sweet can be a part of a healthy snack in moderation. One of my favorite sweet to add is chocolate and especially dark chocolate because it has antioxidants that may help to lower blood pressure and LDL cholesterol. Choose dark chocolate that has at least 70% cocoa in order to receive the most health benefits and doesn't have as much fat or sugar as other chocolates. Otherwise, you can include some candy coated chocolates.

Remember portion control

Calories can add up fast in a trail mix. Nuts and seeds have lots of calories, but provide many nutrients and healthy fats. Candy has a lot of empty calories, which are calories from solid fats and/or added sugars that provide little or no nutrients.

Choosing higher calorie ingredients means you have to pay attention to portion size. Snacks usually range from 100 to 200 calories. Don't forget to eat the right portion size that fits your calorie

needs. A $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of trail mix will usually provide you with the right amount of calories and nutrients to make it a healthy snack.