

Eating Healthy Snacks

Is snacking harmful?

Americans say they are very concerned about nutrition. Fifty-eight percent of those surveyed believe fat in food is a serious health problem. However, according to some food surveys, only 35% say they are doing all they can to eat a balanced diet. A great majority admit they eat between meals. The top-selling snack food in America is potato chips. The number-one snack from vending machines is the Snickers candy bar.

While many people complain they want healthier snacks in vending machines, far fewer people actually buy them. Most Americans feel guilty about picking high-fat, high-calorie snacks, but guilt isn't enough to change their eating habits. Should we feel guilty? Not always. There are times when snacking is important and good for your body.

Who should eat snacks?

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.

Laborers and construction workers have very high energy demands that cannot be met in three meals per day so they may need a snack.

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 fuel flowing to their brains when they need to focus on their work.

If you do not fit into one of the above categories, it is still all right to snack on healthy foods. Just think twice before snacking on high-calorie, high-fat foods. Candy bars and ice cream between meals can lead to weight gain.

What snacks are good?

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. Make sure you eat food from all five food groups during the day.

The five food groups are:

- ▶ meat, poultry, fish, dried beans, eggs
- ▶ grains
- ▶ fruits
- ▶ vegetables
- ▶ milk, cheese, yogurt.

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 10:00 a.m., pick a snack from the food groups that you missed. Because you had only two of the five food groups for breakfast, you should pick a snack from one or more of the other three, like fruits, fruit juice, vegetables, peanut butter on celery, apples, or bagels. Because most Americans do not eat enough

Snack	Grams fat	Calories
Nonfat yogurt with fruit (1 cup)	0	100
Baby carrots (3 oz)	0	40
Fresh fruit: Banana (small)	0	100
Apple (medium)	0	60
Pear (medium)	0	60
Orange (medium)	0	60
Kiwi (2)	0	40
Bagel (1)	1.4	165
Cold cereal	1.0	110
Fig Newtons (2)	2.0	100
Graham crackers (2)	1.5	60
Instant oatmeal (1 oz)	1.7	100
Rice cakes (2)	0.2	70
Pretzels (1 oz)	1.0	110
Skim milk (8 oz)	1.0	110

complex carbohydrates you are usually safe choosing snack foods like whole-grain breads, cereals, bagels, fruits, and vegetables.

Active athletes or growing children who sometimes need foods with more calories can add these items to the list of snack foods: peanut butter sandwiches, low-fat milkshakes (with skim milk and low-fat ice cream), dried fruit, cottage cheese, and pasta with sauce.

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 that 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 that 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.