

Smart Snacking—15 Go-to Snack Ideas

Snacking often brings up images of high-calorie foods with little nutritional value—cookies, chips, soda, ice cream, and others—and it's true that limiting these choices is a good idea. But did you know that well-planned snacks can be a healthy part of your eating plan? The trick is to listen to your hunger cues and be prepared with nutritious options. If you're not sure about your hunger level, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I hungry? (If unsure, wait 20 minutes and ask yourself again.)
- When was the last time I ate? (If it was less than three hours ago, it may not be real hunger.)
- Could a small snack tide me over until the next meal? (Being prepared is key...keep reading for healthy options.)

Be a Smart Snacker

To keep energy levels high and avoid that shaky, headachy feeling that can occur when going too long without food, make smart snacking choices. Smart snacking is mindful—this means you are eating in a conscious, intentional way when you feel hungry between meals and nourishing your body. It can help you avoid bingeing and feelings of deprivation as well as manage cravings and maintain an energy level that allows you to perform at your best. These tips can help you be a “smart snacker”:

- Use snacks to fill in nutritional gaps and to avoid feeling “starved.”
- Remain in control and avoid eating in reaction to emotions, social situations, or favorite foods. When you are truly hungry, eat. When you are not hungry, don't eat. It might take practice to learn to tell the difference.
- Plan nutritious, balanced snacks so you have good options when you are hungry. “Budget” for the times when you want to eat less nutritious snacks.
- Plan out your portions ahead of time so you don't over-do it.

Fifteen Healthy Snack Ideas

These balanced snacks give you a good mix of carbohydrates, protein, fat, and dietary fiber to best satisfy your hunger pangs:

1. Sliced apple with a light spread of peanut or almond butter
2. Baby carrots or ½ apple with a small handful of almonds
3. Broccoli and cauliflower with a light dip (you can make your own by mixing plain low-fat yogurt, lemon juice and dill)
4. Whole-grain crackers or ½ whole-grain pita with hummus
5. Yogurt parfait made with 6 ounces plain low-fat yogurt, fresh or frozen berries and sprinkled with whole-grain cereal
6. Low-fat cottage cheese with pineapple or a sliced sweet pepper
7. Handful of mixed nuts with a whole piece of fruit (apple, apricot, banana, etc.)
8. Sunflower seeds and an orange

9. Fresh berries (strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, etc.) and a cup of low-fat (1%) or soy milk
10. A cup of minestrone, vegetable, or chicken noodle soup (choose soups with no more than 480 mg of sodium per cup)
11. Air-popped popcorn drizzled with a small amount of olive oil and sprinkled with sea salt
12. Whole-grain melba toast with reduced-fat cheese
13. Handful of trail mix made with dried fruits and nuts
14. A stick of part-skim mozzarella string cheese with an apple
15. Strawberries with a small piece of dark chocolate

Well-planned meals and snacks can help you stay satisfied and give you the most nutrition for your calories throughout the day.