

Snacking doesn't have to be unhealthy

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Snacking often elicits mixed reviews. Some health plans say it is important to eat several small meals or snacks during the day to keep metabolism rates in check. Other information states that snacks can be a person's undoing, causing unnecessary weight gain—especially when snacking is frequent. These mixed feelings can be a little confusing.

The National Health and Nutrition Survey supports snacking. The survey found that people who eat snacks in addition to three meals a day had higher levels of nutrients in their diets.

But not all snacks are a good idea. Consuming a fattening bag of potato chips is an unhealthy approach to snacking. However, a piece of dark chocolate or a handful of nuts can add essential nutrients to a person's diet.

Many different snacks make healthy additions to a person's diet. Two to three snacks a day may be all that's needed to help keep a person feeling satiated and less likely to overeat at meals. Here are some healthy snack ideas.

—Olives: A handful of olives can quench a salty craving and provide essential fatty acids that may help to improve heart health.

—Hummus: Hummus is made from chickpeas, which are naturally low in fat and high in fiber. This dip will keep people feeling full.

—Edamame: These are a variety of soybeans that are sweeter, larger and more easily digested than other soybeans. They are a natural source of antioxidants and isoflavones.

—Banana and chocolate: Rolling a banana in semi-sweet chocolate chips can satisfy a fruit and chocolate craving.

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—Dark chocolate bark: Melt dark chocolate and add a desired fruit, such as dried cranberries, cherries or raisins. Enjoy a small piece, which will be high in antioxidants, to fend off hunger pangs.

—String cheese: An individual serving of low-fat mozzarella or Monterey Jack string cheese offers a serving of dairy and protein to keep people full.

—Smoothie: Whip up a smoothie made from protein-rich Greek yogurt and some frozen fruit. Add a dash of fruit juice and blend. Enjoy as a meal replacement or a refreshing snack.

—Fruit: There's no better snack than fruit. Keep a bowl of fruit or some homemade fruit salad on hand and enjoy a small portion when wanting to fill up without consuming too many calories.

—Whole-grain crackers: Fiber-full grain crackers can satisfy salty cravings as well as fill the stomach with something hearty.

Men and women can choose among a variety of healthy snacks throughout the day. Smart snacking can mean reducing feelings of hunger and increasing the amount of nutrients in the body. Snacks also may be an integral component of a healthy weight-loss plan.

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