Best buys for your shopping list—the pantry isles

With an average of 38,718 items in a supermarket, according to Food Marketing Institute, it is hard to know what to buy that is going to give you the most nutrients to fuel your day and your exercise regimen, while leaving your taste buds satisfied.

As mentioned in a previous article, “Snacking can be healthy,” snacks can be tasty, packed with fiber and nutrient-rich foods. Often, our snacking crave is something sweet. So, how do you snack on something sweet that is not packed with sugar? Here are some suggestions of what to have on hand to make a nutritious snack or add to a recipe.

Nut butters such as natural-style peanut butter or almond butter are your best choices. Made with just peanuts, natural-style peanut butter contains heart healthy fats and vitamin E without added sugar or hydrogenated oils.

The best choice, almond butter, is rich in magnesium and calcium for bone building and for the cholesterol-lowering monounsaturated fat. Stay away from the reduced-fat peanut butter. With these “look good” brands, unsaturated fats are swapped out for extra sugar, so they end up having nearly the same calorie count and more sugar than the full-fat version.

You may need to ask your local grocer to order in the natural peanut butter and the almond butter, as they are featured more popularly at a whole foods store.

Interestingly enough, maple syrup has 20 percent fewer calories than honey. It also has antioxidants to help muscle recovery. Maple syrup can be used to lightly sweeten plain yogurt and oatmeal. However, if you are a honey lover, honey is an easily digestible carb that has antioxidants and antibacterial properties.

Imitation maple syrup is what you should stay away from. This maple syrup is made from dyed and refined corn syrup, which makes it packed with “empty” calories with no health qualities at all.

The best fruit spread is apple butter. It is made by cooking down apples to create a spread with a buttery feel but no fat. Be sure to buy brands that are made without added sugar or maybe learn how to make your own!

The next best fruit spread is marmalade. Marmalade is made with whole fruit, including the orange rind. Pick marmalades that are sweetened by fruit-juice varieties. Of course, the jams, jellies and preserves to stay away from are the ones that have more added sugar than fruit. If the sugar is on the ingredient list before the fruit, that spread is one you want to stay away from.

Cereals are a staple of any pantry. Hot cereals should begin with old-fashioned rolled oats. They are a good source of soluble fiber, which is shown to reduce cholesterol. Your best buy will be Quaker Old Fashioned Oats. They contain just oats, so spruce them up with some maple syrup, honey or with berries and chopped walnuts. Hot multigrain cereal is the healthiest choice that contains fiber-rich whole grins like oats, barley, rye and whole wheat with no added sugars.

This cereal can contain six grams of fiber and eight grams of protein. For cold cereals, use the nutrition facts on the box to determine the best choices. These are some guidelines to help you make a healthy choice:

—Serving size—most list a cup as a serving size. Be realistic about how much you will eat and adjust according to the other facts.

—Calories—cap the calories at 200 per cup. Warning: even granola can pack twice the calories and cause weight gain.

—Fiber—fiber keeps you full and helps steady blood-sugar levels. Choose brands that have five grams or more per cup.

—Sugar—choose one that has fewer than 10 grams per cup.

—Sodium—pick a brand that has 200 milligrams or fewer in one cup.

—Ingredient list—the first ingredient should be whole grain. Skip those that list cane juice, dextrose, rice syrup or hydrogenated oils near the top of the list.

Remember that just a few alterations or changes in even just your pantry can help you lose or maintain weight and gear you up for a productive day at the office or a long-distance run.

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