

News Release From:
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Make Snacking Count

By Janet Hackert, Regional Nutrition and Health Education Specialist

Research shows that snacking is becoming a bigger part of people's eating habits, with an average of 580 calories consumed as snacks throughout the day. So why not make these dietary interludes count!

With as much as a quarter of calorie intake coming from non-meal food consumption (also known as snacking), there are ways to make those snacks count toward overall daily nutrient intake. Typically people think of snacks as foods like chips, cookies and other high calorie, high sugar, high fat, and high sodium foods. By thinking of them as 'mini-meals' instead, we can use them to add needed and sometimes hard-to-get nutrients into our eating plans.

Plan ahead to have healthy options handy instead of settling for whatever can be found when hunger strikes. For example, have healthy options like whole grain crackers or popcorn on the table or in the cupboard, or cheese slices or cut up fruit in the fridge at home for when a little something is needed between meals. Create a snack bag for in a purse, vehicle or student's back pack with an apple, or individual applesauce container, a snack bag of whole grain cereal, and/or baby carrots. Likewise, have items at a desk or other workspace that are quick, ready to eat, and nutritious. Watch the Nutrition Facts label and ingredient list to determine how good a food is – just because the package says "100 calories," it may be 100 calories mostly from fat (which would not be a lot of food), or it could be 100 calories that includes some fiber, protein, Vitamin A or other nutrients we need to feel satiated and be healthy.

Have a variety of tastes and textures to satisfy the range of cravings that come along. For example, when looking for something crunchy, instead of a small bag of chips from the vending machine or convenience store (and their 300 calories, 20 grams of fat and 350 mg of sodium), plan ahead to have a half cup of crisp raw broccoli (and its 22 calories, 0 grams of fat, 20 mg of sodium AND 22% Daily Value of Vitamin A and 97% Daily Value of Vitamin C!).

But remember, healthy snacking is about substitution, not addition. Those higher calorie, lower nutrient density foods are fine for once in a while, when, for example nothing but a small square of dark chocolate will do, but move toward making the healthier choices the more common ones for between meals snacking and enjoy those mini-meal breaks.

For more information on healthy snacking or any other topic, please feel free to contact me, Janet Hackert, Nutrition and Health Education Specialist, at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu or your local University of Missouri Extension office.