



SNACK SMART

Food between meals, or “snacks”, can provide a needed nutritional boost. However, the reality is that most of us are “snacking” too frequently and on the wrong foods. Children today are consuming almost 200 calories more per day on “snacks” than their parents did.¹ Here is the reality of today’s snacking habits:

The Facts:

- Dessert food, such as cookies and cake, are the most popular snack choices among children and adolescents. Salty snacks are second choice and climbing fast. **Over the past decade, whole fruit has been replaced by fruit drinks as a snack.**
- On average, we are reaching for “snack food” 3 times per day. **1 in 6 adults receives 40% of daily calories through snacks.**²
- Americans get more and more added sugar in their diet every year. Much of this added sugar is contained in the snacks that we eat. **The American Heart Association recommends children 4-8 years get no more than 4 teaspoons of added sugar per day, and yet the average child in this age group gets 21 added teaspoons.**
- Overall, the foods and beverages we are choosing for our snacks are high in calories but low in nutrients, and may contribute to obesity and other diet-related illness.

HOW TO SNACK SMART:

1. **Designate a set snack time.** Small children may need a mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack. School-aged children, who typically eat an early lunch at school, may only need an afterschool snack, but one that is substantial enough to satisfy hunger and provide much needed nutrients after a long day of learning. Adults may need one or two snacks, depending on their schedule. **Plan for a healthy snack on the go, especially with children, and try carrot sticks instead of crackers.*
2. **Choose healthy foods** to satisfy your hunger, such as a small amount of protein (nuts, grains, legumes, dairy) paired with fruits and fiber-rich plant foods.
3. **Add before you take away.** Focus on all the new and delicious whole foods you are adding to your diet rather than what you are cutting out. Reduce consumption of chips, pretzels, cookies or other nutritionally empty food by gradually buying less of them – look at labels and be aware of what you are eating. Choose foods low in added sugar.
4. **Remember** – a snack is intended to give our bodies a pick-up between meals – NOT to replace the meal altogether.

¹“U.S. Children: Generation Snack”, Tara Parker-Pope, nytimes.com, 3/2/2010

²“Snacking Patterns of US Adults”, www.ars.usda.gov, June 2011

