Quick Takes

Healthy Snack Options for Busy People

A recent weight loss study has confirmed that choosing healthy foods has a positive role in weight control. The study reported that:

- Participants who snacked on fruits, vegetables, nuts and whole grains gained less weight than those who chose popular high-calorie snack foods.
- Eating more healthy foods reduced the intake of higher calorie foods, reducing the total amount of calories consumed.

Researchers concluded that healthy snacks can be – and should be – a part of everyone’s healthy eating plan. The right snacks can help you manage your weight and keep you energized all day long.

Today’s food environment is loaded with hundreds of snack choices. More often than not, snacks are not especially healthy choices. Check out our real-world strategies for how to make the right snack choices.

Vending Machine: Friend or Foe?

It’s not that hard to keep fruits, vegetables and other healthy snacks on hand at home. But the workplace is another story. If you haven’t brought a snack from home, you’re likely to visit the vending machine. If you look carefully, you can often find healthy — or at least low-calorie — options. Some machines even have fresh fruit or yogurt!

One positive quality of the vending machine is that it controls your portions. Most bags of chips are only 1 ounce for instance.

Below are quick lists of healthy and not-so-healthy choices you might encounter at the average vending machine.

**HEALTHY CHOICES AT THE VENDING MACHINE**

Apple or Orange.........Way to make your nutritionist smile!
Cereal bars...............A source for whole grains.
Fig bars....................Good source of fiber – tasty too.
Peanuts.....................Good choice – stick to 1 small package.
Potato chips...............Practice portion control and stick to 1 little bag.
Pretzels (1 oz)..........Low in fat, high in crunch and sodium. Stick to 1 little bag.
String cheese............Great portable source of protein and calcium.
Sunflower seeds..........Good choice – stick to 1 package.
Trail mix..................Good choice – but don’t go back for seconds.
V8/tomato juice.........Half the calories of fruit juice.
Yogurt (6 oz)............Contains protein and calcium. Stick to 1 container.

**NOT-SO-HEALTHY CHOICES AT THE VENDING MACHINE**

Cookies....................Do you really want to spend sweet-treat calories on snack machine cookies?
Cheese puffs..............Set your limit at 1 little bag.
Chocolate bar............A 2-oz bar has about 260 calories.
Honey bun...............This vending machine standard is heavy on the fat and sugar.
Nacho chips..............Set your limit at 1 little bag.
Peanut butter/ Cheese sandwich crackers......The neon orange vending machine icons come in whole-wheat too.
Potato chips..............Practice portion control and stick to 1 little bag.
Red licorice.............High calories for no nutrition benefit.
Toaster pastry...........Plenty of sugar and additives here. Choose another option.
Workplace Snack Strategies
There are loads of healthy, no-fuss options that can keep you satisfied throughout the day without turning to junk food. Here are four quick strategies you can try today!

1. Use the freezer! Slice up your favorite fruit (try a mango!), slip into a plastic lock-tight bag and put it into the freezer at work. Grab a slice at break time. Grapes work great too and taste like tiny round Popsicles. Or try low-calorie Fudgesicles.

2. Have some healthy popcorn! Air-popped popcorn doesn't have to be full of fat. Save calories (and money!) by microwaving your own popcorn. Just put 1/4 cup of plain kernels in a brown paper bag, scrunch it up, and put it in your microwave for about 2½ minutes. Instant healthy snack! Three cups of popcorn popped this way is only 115 calories!

3. Make your own trail mix. Put together your favorite whole-grain cereal, some pretzels, your favorite nuts, sunflower or pumpkin seeds, and dried fruit (raisins/dried cranberries). Be creative! Trying to lose weight? Then choose your trail mix options wisely! Here's an example that will keep you at 150 calories:
   - 5 walnuts
   - 25 pumpkin seeds
   - 1/4 cup high-fiber cereal
   - 10 raisins

4. Fruits and vegetables pack a lot of nutrition into far fewer calories than a bag of chips. And their rich fiber content helps you feel full. Try to eat 7 servings of fruits and vegetables a day. In addition, adding a small amount of protein to your meals and snacks will help you feel satisfied longer because it takes longer to digest. Buy baby carrots and pre-cut broccoli or cauliflower florets. Pull them out of the fridge when hunger strikes and dip them in salsa or a tasty bean dip like the one below.

Garlicky Bean Dip  Makes about 3 cups of dip.

Don't be shocked that the first ingredient in this recipe is 2 heads (not cloves!) of garlic! They're roasted to a mellow sweetness in the oven and won't overpower the other flavors in this easy dip.

You can prepare the bean puree 2 or 3 days in advance. Cover and refrigerate. Pack into small recloseable containers to bring to work with you.

INGREDIENTS
2 heads garlic
one 15-oz can low-sodium white navy or cannellini beans, drained
1/4 cup plain nonfat yogurt or Greek yogurt
the juice of 1 lemon
2 tablespoons olive oil, plus extra for brushing
a sprig of fresh sage or parsley, for garnish

DIRECTIONS
1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Slice tops off garlic heads. Brush with olive oil. Wrap the heads in aluminum foil. Bake until soft, 45 to 60 minutes. Refrigerate until cold.

2. Combine beans, yogurt, lemon juice and olive oil in a blender or food processor. Add the roasted cloves of garlic. Process until smooth. Transfer to a shallow serving bowl.

3. Garnish the dip with a sprig of fresh herbs. Serve with toasted whole-wheat pita wedges or vegetables for dipping.

NUTRITION PER SERVING
Per 2-tablespoon serving
45 Calories
1.2 g Fat
0.4 g Saturated fat
1.5 g Protein
5 g Carbohydrate
1 g Fiber
60 mg Sodium

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