



Snacking Healthy *Add Snacks to Subtract Pounds -- By Liz Noelcke, Staff Writer*

While some dieters happily accept when someone suggests a snack, others feel pangs of guilt when a nibble is merely suggested. However, there is nothing inherently wrong with a bite between meals. In fact, snacking might be the missing ingredient that will help you reach your weight loss goals.

But how can this make sense, since snacking theoretically *adds* calories?

Snacking doesn't serve to replace a meal. In fact, you should spread meals and snacks out by an hour or two, and snacks should total a couple hundred calories or less.

Munching between meals can actually reduce your overall caloric intake by curbing overeating at your next meal. By controlling later binging, snacking can help you stay on track. You can actually use this to your advantage. If you know you are going out to a big dinner with friends later, for example, make sure you have a healthy snack before you head out so you're less likely to order (and finish) a large entrée.

How You Snack Can Make or Break Your Diet

There is definitely a wrong way and a right way to snack. You should avoid sugary items like candy and soda, and shouldn't be consuming enough calories to constitute a meal. Instead, steer towards foods that will satisfy you and keep you feeling fuller longer. Fruits and vegetables are always a safe bet because they are low in fat and calories. (Just be sure to avoid high-calorie dips.) Yogurt, fruit smoothies, even a slice of whole-wheat toast all make great snacks during the day. Combining lean protein, some healthy fat, and complex carbohydrates will help you feel fuller longer.

Mini Meals

Many experts are recommending several smaller meals throughout the day instead of the usual three. By eating at regular intervals, your blood sugar levels (and therefore your energy levels) remain stable. So, instead of that mid-afternoon crash, you'll be full of vigor through dinnertime! Eating every few hours (especially if you chew on fruits and veggies) can also help add extra nutrition that might be missing from other meals.

Snacking Isn't Grazing

Mindless eating is often the downfall of many snackers. You may start with only a handful of your favorite crackers, only to finish the entire box, without even thinking about it. Obviously, this example isn't the healthy snacking that can help you reach your weight loss goals.

To avoid grazing:

- Fill a small plate with your snack, and leave the kitchen. Just walk away. When your plate is empty, snack time is over.
- Never bring the entire container with you in front of the television or computer. Enjoy your snack without distraction and you won't be tempted to reach for more.
- If you stand around the snack table chatting at a party, you may find yourself reaching for food when the conversation lulls. This can often lead to an unintentional binge because you simply aren't paying attention to what you are eating.
- Limit yourself to a single serving.

- Plan out your snacks just like you would a meal. Is one cookie worth the calorie cost, when you could eat a plate of fresh fruit instead?

Practice Moderation

As with the rest of your diet, moderation is crucial when snacking. Make sure that you are adding every snack to your Nutrition Tracker, along with the larger meals you eat during the day. If you don't keep track, you might add excess calories and fat to your diet without realizing it.

Don't sabotage your diet with unhealthy nibbles throughout the day; stick to nourishing foods whenever possible. If you know you have a weakness for junk food, do yourself a favor and don't purchase these items next time you are at the grocery store. Then you won't have to fight the temptation of ice cream or potato chips when hunger pangs hit.