

February: Snack Food Month

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Over the last 30 years, the average number of snacks consumed by adults per day has doubled, according to the USDA Food Surveys Research Group. Snacking by adolescents has also increased significantly in recent decades. On average, snacks provide about one-third of daily calories. For many, the snack foods and beverages contributing the most calories aren't always the most nutritious options.



However, snacking can be part of a healthy eating plan. February is Snack Food Month, and healthy snacks can provide lots of nutrition

with fewer calories. Check out the following information on making smarter snacking easier.

Tips for Snacking Smarter:

MyPlate and snack food selection: Choose snack foods from the MyPlate food groups. Choose a variety of fruits and vegetables to help get the full range of vitamins, minerals, and fiber needed for



health. Whole fresh fruits, dried fruits, and packaged pre-cut vegetables are easy snacks to carry along. Snack on whole grains such as popcorn, low-fat granola

bars, brown rice cakes, or snack mixes with whole-grain cereal. Consume three cups per day of fat-free or low-fat dairy, such as yogurt, string cheese, or cottage cheese. Eat a variety of lean protein such as meat, poultry, beans, eggs, nuts, and seeds.

Develop a smarter snacking plan: To keep snacking under control, plan what to eat, how much,



and when to eat a snack. Planned snacking reduces the likelihood of overeating on not-so-healthy foods at a fast-

food restaurant, vending machine, or convenience store. To keep snacks from replacing meals, avoid eating snacks within one hour of meals.

Keep nutritious snacks handy: Research shows that availability often drives snack selection. If your cupboard is full of cookies, chips, and candy, it's



easy to make them your snack. Fresh, frozen, dried, or canned fruits can be easy "grab-and-go" options that need little preparation.

Store sliced vegetables in the fridge and eat them with dips like hummus or low-fat dressing. Have healthy snacks portioned into snack-size bags or containers.

Compare food labels: Read the Nutrition Facts



Label on products to find food with the most nutrition for your money. Using the Nutrition Facts Label helps you compare

fat, calories, fiber, sodium and sugar found in different items. They also provide information on the serving size and how many servings are in an item.

Eat snacks only when hungry: Thirst is often misinterpreted as hunger, so it's important to drink plenty of water during the day. Avoid eating snacks out of boredom or frustration; try physical activity instead. Every person has varying needs when it comes to snacking, depending on activity levels,



portion sizes at meals, and work schedule. Elderly adults and toddlers may have difficulty eating large meals because of

stomach capacity, and may do well with several small snacks throughout the day. Children and teens are more likely to need snacks because of their growth and higher physical activity levels. Plan ahead for children's snack needs to avoid last-minute unhealthy snacking decisions.

For more detailed information on smarter snacking check out this NebGuide at <http://go.unl.edu/0c8p>.

For more food, nutrition and health information from Nebraska Extension go to www.food.unl.edu.

Recipe Ideas for Smarter Snacks!

Fruit Kabobs with Dip (12 Servings)

- **Ingredients:** 1 medium tart apple, cut into 1-inch chunks, 1 medium pear, cut into 1-inch chunks, 1 tablespoon lemon juice, 1 can (8 ounces) pineapple chunks, drained, 24 grapes (about ¼ pound), 24 fresh strawberries, 12 wooden skewers, and 1 (6 ounce) container low-fat yogurt.
- **Directions:** Toss apple and pear with lemon juice. Divide fruit into 12 portions and thread onto wooden skewers. Serve kabobs with yogurt dip
- **Source:** <http://go.unl.edu/2u5q>

Snack Mix Fun

- **Directions:** To make a healthy, crunchy snack, you do not have to have a recipe. Use your imagination and see what you can put in your snack to make it uniquely your creation. You can use any kind of cereals that you have, even if it is just a small amount. Add any kind of dried fruit, nuts, pretzels, crackers, and popcorn. Mix it all together and share with family and friends.
- **Ingredient ideas:** Sunflower seeds, banana chips, tropical dried fruit mix, dried cranberries, raisins, whole-wheat cereal of different sizes and shapes, cheese crackers, popcorn, pretzels, chocolate chips, and roasted soy nuts.
- **Source:** <https://food.unl.edu/youth/snacks#snackfun>

Additional Resources & Links:

Super Simple Snack Mixes. Check out this collection of recipes on snack mixes for youth. <http://food.unl.edu/youth/snacks>

Cook it Quick: Snacks & Dips. Preparing these recipes and using the tips will help you increase consumption of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products. At the same time, you'll

reduce sodium, solid fats, and calories. <http://food.unl.edu/snacks-dips>

Meal and Snack Patterns and Ideas. These sample meal and snack patterns from ChooseMyPlate.gov can help you translate Daily Food Plan amounts into individual meals and snacks.

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers/meal-and-snack-patterns-ideas.html>

Food Fun for Young Children. Serving up quick, healthy snack ideas for younger children.

<http://food.unl.edu/fnh/food-fun-for-young-children>

UNL Extension Calendar. National Food Days, Weeks, and Months for February.

<http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/february>

Sources:

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