

Judging Whether Snacks Are Healthy



Choosing healthy snacks means shopping smart. Be cautious of the health claims on food packages. Here are some things to watch out for.

Just because something is "all natural" or "pure" doesn't necessarily mean that it's nutritious. For example, "all natural" juice drinks or sodas can be filled with sugar (which is, after all, a natural ingredient) but all that sugar means they'll be high in calories and give you little nutrition. A granola bar is a good example of a snack that people think is healthy. Although granola bars can be a good source of certain vitamins and nutrients, many also contain a great deal of fat, including a particularly harmful type of fat called **trans fat**. On average, about 35% of the calories in a regular granola bar come from fat. And there can be a lot of sugar in granola cereals and bars. Check the Nutrition Facts label on the package to be sure.

Be skeptical of low-fat food claims, too. If the fat has been eliminated or cut back, the amount of sugar in the food may have increased to keep that food tasting good. Many low-fat foods have nearly as many calories as their full-fat versions. Whatever claims a food's manufacturer writes on the front of the package, you can judge whether a food is healthy for you by reading the ingredients and the nutrition information on the food label.

Choose healthy snacks

Select foods that satisfy your hunger, supply your body with energy and provide important nutrients. Here are some of your best snack picks

- **Whole grains.** Whole-grain snacks are rich in fiber and complex carbohydrates, which give you energy with staying power. Look for items such as low-fat whole-grain crackers, whole-grain pretzels and whole-grain crispbreads.
- **Fruits and vegetables.** Eating fruits and vegetables provides a feeling of fullness with no fat and only a small number of calories. They also provide vitamins, minerals, fiber and other nutrients.
- **Nuts and seeds.** Nuts and seeds provide protein, so you will feel fuller longer. They can be high in fat, but it's mostly monounsaturated, a healthy kind of fat. Nuts and seeds are high in calories, however, so don't eat them in large quantities.
- **Low-fat dairy products.** Cheese, yogurt and other dairy products are good sources of calcium and protein, plus many other vitamins and minerals. Dairy products can be high in fat, so choose the low-fat versions. Some yogurts have extra added sugar, so look for low-calorie or "light" varieties

So what are your best choices? Here are several suggestions:

Weight-loss snacks	
Approximate number of calories	Food
10 calories	1 large stalk of celery
25-30 calories	1 cup raw vegetables 6 medium baby carrots
60 calories	2 cups air-popped or light popcorn 1 cup of cantaloupe or grapes 1 small can of vegetable juice
100 calories	1 cup sliced bananas and fresh raspberries 2 domino-sized slices low-fat Colby or cheddar cheese 1 fat-free chocolate pudding cup
150 calories	1/2 cup frozen, low-fat yogurt topped with 1/2 cup blueberries 1 cup sliced apples with 1 tablespoon smooth peanut butter

	4 rye crispbread crackers
200 calories	1/4 cup dry roasted soy nuts (calories vary by brand) 1/3 cup granola 1 cup low-fat cottage cheese topped with 1/2 cup sliced fresh peaches

Quick, easy-to-prepare snacks

You'll find it easier to choose good-for-you snacks if you stock your refrigerator and shelves with foods that are fast — not fussy. These ideas for healthy snacks minimize fat and calories and maximize whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

- Toast one-half of a whole-wheat English muffin. Top with one slice Canadian bacon, a tomato slice and one slice low-fat American cheese. Microwave until the cheese melts.
- Mash half a banana into 2 teaspoons peanut butter and spread onto a whole-grain bagel. Large bagels contain up to 300 calories, so choose a smaller 2-ounce bagel.
- Mix 1/4 cup cold leftover chicken or convenience-type chunk chicken with sliced seedless grapes, 1/2 tablespoon sunflower seeds, 1 tablespoon plain yogurt or fat-free mayonnaise, and a dash of curry powder. Stuff into a hollowed-out green pepper or half of a whole-wheat pita pocket.
- Spread 1 tablespoon part-skim ricotta cheese over one-half of a small cinnamon-raisin bagel. Sprinkle with cinnamon if desired and top with a thinly sliced apple.
- Layer a 6-inch soft corn or flour tortilla with 2 tablespoons shredded low-fat cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese. Microwave until the cheese melts. Slice into bite-sized pie shapes. Dip into some salsa if desired.
- Spread 1 tablespoon ricotta cheese over a brown rice cake. Layer with fresh strawberries or a tablespoon of sugar-free spreadable fruit. Or try using a spread of herbed goat cheese and sliced olives.
- Top a small baked potato with 2 tablespoons fat-free plain yogurt and sprinkle with Cajun seasoning.
- Spread 1 tablespoon fruit-flavored low-fat yogurt or 100 percent fruit jam over a slice of whole-grain crispbread