



## **The Art of Snacking**

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For some people, snacking is a part of life: they eat more food when “grazing” than they do at meals. Others view snacking as a bad habit: they are convinced that good nutrition demands a rigid three meals a day without any other eating. Actually, snacking itself is neither good nor bad. The effects of snacking depend on the choices you make and why you do it.

Sometimes the interval between meals is just too long. Your energy level and capacity to concentrate fall off. A snack can make you able to continue functioning at your best. When the next meal comes, you can relax and enjoy it, making reasonable choices, rather than diving into the meal like someone who hasn’t seen food for three days.

The key is to choose a snack that provides more than just a quick flash of energy. While candy gives a short burst, your body quickly uses this energy, leaving you feeling worse than you did before. The sugar in fruits is absorbed more slowly and provides an hour or two of energy for most people, since they are also mainly sugar. If you need a snack with longer-lasting energy, try something that provides a little protein. Peanut butter on apple slices or whole-wheat toast, lowfat vanilla yogurt with a small box of raisins stirred in, or a cup of bean soup will hold you much longer.

Snacks can even help you meet your health and nutrition goals. Many Americans neglect to eat the five to ten servings of fruits and vegetables recommended by health experts like the

American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR). Snacking on vegetables with salsa or hummus is one way to increase your intake. Some people find that they don't eat enough whole grains. A snack mixture of whole-grain cereal squares is tasty and portable. Many of us also fall short on drinking the water that we need. Try making a big glass of water a standard part of snack breaks. It may be the only part you need.

When you see beautiful scones, muffins and croissants lined up on display, try not to rationalize your purchase. These are not "grains, just like bread." The muffins and scones run about 400 to 500 calories each, and the croissants about 250 to 550. That's comparable to eating three to five slices of bread topped with four to eight pats of butter. And "just one cookie" is loaded with 250 to 400 calories, if it's the size of a pancake. Biscotti would be a lower-calorie cookie choice, but it's certainly not a long-lasting energy source.

Snacks aren't helpful when you're not really hungry, but rather bored, tired, stressed, or using food to provide something it can't. If you're not hungry, take a look at the reason for the snacking urge and try to meet that need in a more appropriate way. While it may feel as if you need sugar or caffeine for energy, often a mental break and a little physical activity gives a better and more lasting energy boost.

Snacking can be a definite plus for good nutrition, but not if you graze at random from one snack to another. Choose foods that can provide the fuel you need right away, along with the nutrients that will help you stay healthy in the years ahead.

If you need help to improve your eating habits and prevent weight gain, *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*<sup>TM</sup> can help. Contact your local base Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian for more information.

