

Those Sneaky Snacks!

As I began to mentally outline the contents of this article, a saying that my dad commonly used came to mind. “Don’t do as I do, do as I say!” I would like to be able to report that I am diligent in making my snacking habits healthy and timely, but that simply isn’t always the case. I know the “rules” of smart and healthy snacking, but they sometime allude me just as they do for the majority of Americans.

With the holidays upon us, I thought reviewing smart and healthy snacking tips would be a timely topic. A snack is defined as food or beverage consumed between meals because of hunger or boredom. Dr. Tandalayo Kidd, Nutrition Specialist for K-State Research and Extension explains that snacking can be a good thing and part of a healthy, balanced diet. The trick is to reach for healthy foods when you are hungry instead of unhealthy choices. It isn’t unusual to find ourselves munching on a bag of popcorn while we watch TV or to grab a couple of chocolate pieces because we are bored. The question to ask is, “Am I hungry?” You might be taking the wrong cues from your body. Instead of hunger, your body may associate feelings or conditions that you have experienced with the desire for food. These are called triggers. Examples of triggers include stress, boredom, and happiness. Dr. Kidd explains “These triggers can be dealt with by indulging in another source of happiness, relaxation, or stress relief, such as reading a book, calling a friend, walking in the park, or doing some other activity.”

Use MyPlate as a Guide

In those cases when you have determined you are indeed hungry, and not simply bored, you should rely on healthy snacks that are a planned part of your daily intake. Snacks should be tasty, quick, and satisfying. They are part of a healthy eating plan when incorporated into the diet appropriately. The amount of snack consumed should be enough to satisfy your hunger and hold you over until your next meal. Snacks, by definition, are not designed to replace meals. Choose from one of the five MyPlate food groups, outlined by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA.) A few examples of healthy snacks include whole-grain breads and cereals, fresh fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy products and lean protein foods. A well-balance healthy snack would include nutrient rich items from two of these food groups such as low-fat granola and dried fruit or carrots with nonfat yogurt dip.

Stock Up on Healthy Snack Foods

Planned snacks are our first line of defense from getting into an unhealthy snacking rut. Make sure these items are readily available by making them part of the standard items on your grocery list. Making the snacks creative and interesting will add to establishing healthier snacking patterns. One approach I use in my own home is to have the main ingredients for trail mix on hand. In my pantry, I keep a variety of nuts, dried fruit, and whole grain cereals on hand. Because my family does not all like the same combination of ingredients in their trail mix, I create combinations unique to their preferences and portion their snack using plastic snack bags. This ensures that they are getting a healthy snack that I know they like and will eat.

Stock your pantry, refrigerator, and freezer with healthy snacks such as cut-up raw vegetables, favorite whole grain breads, muffins, pretzels, graham crackers, low-fat cheese, or fruit, to name a few. Keep a

lower cabinet drawer stocked with non-perishable healthy snacks so that your children can reach them without assistance and do the same with a drawer in the refrigerator for the perishable snacks. Keep in mind some basic shopping tips: 1) Be careful not to overstock so that you don't have food on hand that spoils before you can get it used. 2) Avoid buying the tempting high-calorie, low nutrient foods. These foods are high in fat and contain excessive amounts of calories that will work against the benefits of healthy snacking. 3) If you simply can't hold back from occasionally buying some cookies, chips, or ice cream, store them in places that are inconvenient to get to or place them out of sight to help curb unplanned snacking urges.

Time Your Snacking

Remember that the purpose of healthy snacking is to curb hunger between meals. It prevents you from arriving at mealtime being overly hungry which can assist you in making healthier choices during the meal. Snacking two or three hours prior to a meal will prevent you from ruining your appetite for the next main meal. Try to avoid significant snacking in the evenings, as well. If you have children in your home, note that they are watching your eating habits and that directly impacts the eating habits they establish. Snacking with healthy foods for the purposes of satisfying hunger is win-win situation for both you and your children. If you are bored and tempted to snack, find an activity that you can do with your children. You can take a walk, read a book, or play a game with your children instead of snacking. Sometimes kids will say they are hungry when all they really want is attention. Give them the positive attention they are craving by spending some time with them rather than responding to their trigger for snacking.

The holiday season offers a lot of opportunities to snack and graze. If we have a plan and purpose for eating, it can only help us fight off the indulgent snacking that tends to come with the season. For more information about meeting the challenges of healthy eating during the holidays, feel free to contact me at the Geary County Extension Office 785-238-4161. Finally, a heartfelt Happy Thanksgiving to you and your family. Keep living resourcefully!