

The Smart Way to Snack by the American Institute for Cancer Research

The average American snacks throughout the day, often without thinking. Smart snacking, however, can be good for you.

Preliminary research indicates that eating small amounts of healthy food throughout the day might help control weight. A recent study tracked 499 people for four years. Those people who ate four or more small meals a day were 45 percent less likely to be obese than the people who ate three or fewer large meals each day.

When you're shopping for groceries, keep these three basic snack guidelines in mind ...

The researchers of this study think that eating only one or two large meals each day might cause higher spikes in blood insulin levels. As a result of these spikes, more blood sugar tends to be stored in fat cells. Snacking may prevent this increase in fat cells. In general, when people spread out their calorie consumption in smaller amounts during the day, they tend to have more stable blood insulin levels.

The Snack Trap

However, eating too much of some common snacks, like cookies and chips, and eating them too often can contribute to obesity, cancer, diabetes and heart disease. Although some U.S. snack manufacturers have announced that they will make smaller, bite-sized snacks with less sugar and trans fats in single-serving packages, you still need to watch what you eat.

The truth is those bite-sized munchies are still not a wise choice for everyday snacks if you want to shed pounds. Even with less trans fats, chips, cookies and most other commercial snack foods are still high in total fat, sugar and salt. To curb your appetite and manage your weight, you need to find nutritious snacks instead, like cut veggies, fruits, low fat yogurt, nuts and unfrosted whole grain cereal squares.

Keep Apples, Not Cookies Nearby

The secret to finding healthy snack alternatives is to always keep them on hand. Purchase them at grocery stores and pack them for work. Have some always in the car or your purse. When you're shopping for groceries, keep these three basic snack guidelines in mind:

1. The types of food you eat should provide dietary fiber, phytochemicals, vitamins and minerals while helping you avoid excessive fat, sugar and salt. Plant-based foods, like vegetables and fruits are ideal snacks.
2. The portion sizes of snacks should be appropriate to your body size, activity level and calorie needs for the day. Avoid oversized snacks. For example, the smallest size of a low fat latte may be all your body needs.
3. Remember to snack only when you are hungry. If you find that you want to snack out of boredom or habit, take a walk, call a friend or try to keep your hands busy to avoid grabbing some unnecessary calories.

The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) has plenty of good snack suggestions, along with recipes, in its brochure ***Snacks – Homemade for Health***. Call AICR at 1-800-843-8114, extension 110 to request a free copy.