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For Better Living
It's Snack Time!

A recent study found that more than 95 percent of American women and children have at least one snack a day. Snacking can be part of a healthy eating plan or it can be a harmful habit. The difference between healthy and harmful snacking is up to you.

Snacks can be packed with nutrients and supply our bodies with energy. They can fill nutritional gaps if you make smart choices. The following tips will help determine if the snacks you choose contribute to a healthful diet.

1. Select foods from the MyPyramid food groups: meat and beans, fruits, vegetables, grains, and milk and milk products. Snacks from these groups contribute more nutritional value and usually fewer calories than foods that are high in fat and sugar.
2. To keep snacking under control, develop a snack plan. Include what you will eat, how much and when you will eat a snack. If you have children, involve them in the snack plan.
3. Use snacks to supplement daily meals, not to replace them. If you snack within one hour of a meal, the snack may interfere with your appetite.
4. Have healthy snack choices available for yourself and your family. Snacks are often chosen on their availability. If your pantry is full of cookies, chips and candy, that will probably be your choice. It's hard to choose grapes over cookies if they aren't available.
5. Eat snacks only when you are hungry. Adults may not need snacks to get through the day. This depends on the amount of physical activity, portion sizes at meals and work schedule. Elderly adults, on the other hand, may do better with several small snacks during the day. Children and teens are more likely to need snacks because of their growth and the amount of time they are physically active. Small children also have less stomach capacity. They may need snacks at mid-morning or mid-afternoon. Plan ahead for your child's snack to avoid last-minute snack decisions.

It is also a good idea to limit sweetened beverages such as soda and fruity drinks. They add many calories and little or no nutrients to your diet. Limit snacks with saturated or trans fats, cholesterol and added sugars and salt. Many pre-packaged snack foods such as cookies, crackers, chips and microwave popcorn may have trans fats. Be sure to read the nutrition label to find out.

It is recommended to keep your total fat intake below 35 percent of your calories and keep your sodium under one teaspoon per day. Whole fruits and vegetables, low fat dairy products and whole grain cereals are good snack choices for limiting fat, sugar and salt intake.

Source: Nebraska Cooperative Extension

Snack Mix

- 2 cups unsweetened cereal
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 cup dried cranberries, or other dried fruit

3 cups small pretzels

½ cup peanuts

Combine all ingredients in a large bowl. Mix . Store tightly covered