

Healthy & quick pick-me-ups

WHEN THERE'S NO TIME FOR A PROPER MEAL, REACH FOR A SNACK THAT SATISFIES THE HUNGER PANGS BUT DOESN'T COMPROMISE YOUR HEALTH OR MAKE YOU FAT

If you're always on the go and don't have time for a proper meal, you're bound to snack on something to pacify your grumbling belly. There's really no harm in snacking, unless all you're reaching out for is a greasy bag of potato crisps or a calorie-laden candy bar.

There are advantages to snacking if you're smart and sensible about it. In fact, eating little but often is better than stuffing yourself with three large meals a day.

Throughout the day, your stomach produces digestive juices to help break down food. Feeding your stomach every three to four hours helps to keep that digestive 'fire' burning.

Depriving yourself of food for long periods of time will slow down the production of these digestive juices.

And when you eventually get down to eating, your stomach will be ill-prepared to deal with the barrage of food coming its way and you'll end up with an upset stomach.

Frequent munching tames your hunger and provides the body with a continuous supply of energy to keep you going throughout the day. It keeps your insulin levels steady so you won't experience mood swings when you don't have enough to eat.

Snacking several times a day also means you'll be less likely to overeat once mealtime rolls around.

Think of snacking as grazing: nibbling on mini meals that are light so they won't leave you feeling overstuffed, yet sufficient to satisfy your hunger.

Being on the move is no excuse to eat whatever junk food that's available. Our digestive system requires quality food and drinks to enable the brain, muscles, liver and skin to perform the many functions that keep us healthy.

The key to smart snacking is choosing non-fattening foods that enrich your diet with carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals.

Nutritious nibbles

Eating a packet of potato crisps won't give you a carbohydrate boost. Instead, you might find yourself suffering from indigestion and weight gain after one too many fattening snacks.

Instead of crisps, munch on boiled or steamed corn kernels but skip the salt and butter. Corn is a good source of dietary fibre which has been shown to help lower cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of colon cancer.

Oatmeal biscuits make a healthy snack for busy people. Like wholegrain muffins and wholemeal buns, oatmeal biscuits are loaded with carbohydrates that will supply slow but sustainable increases in energy and blood-sugar levels.

Best of all, they're high in fibre so they fill you up quickly, and low in fat so you



Fill up on fruits

Eating too many chocolate and candy bars can cause your blood-sugar levels to go up one minute and down the next leaving you feeling sluggish.

A healthier option is fresh fruits. Fat-free and rich in vitamins, minerals and fibre, fresh fruits are also wonderfully refreshing on a hot, sunny day.

Apples and pears are handy to have around when you're craving for food because all that is required is a quick rinse under the tap. Sink your teeth into their crunchiness to gain the benefits of vitamin C, an antioxidant that helps fight heart disease.

Apples and pears are rich in fibre and pectin too which help detoxify the system and encourage regular elimination.

High in carbohydrates, bananas give your body an instant surge of energy when you're feeling low and need a pick-me-up. They also contain tryptophan which calms the nervous system and helps to counter stress.

If you can't feast on fresh fruits, dried fruits like apricots, raisins, prunes, dates and figs are better than none.

Veggie delicious

Carrot and celery sticks make healthy snacks but if you find them a little bland, eat them with peanut butter or hummus. Hummus is a popular dip or spread made from mashed chick peas blended with tahini (sesame seed paste), garlic, olive oil, salt and lemon juice.

Dunk your carrot and celery sticks into this creamy puree or spread the hummus on a slice of wholemeal bread for a wholesome treat.

This way, you can manage your hunger while contributing to your daily requirement of vegetables.

Light bites

Sunflower and pumpkin seeds, cashew nuts and almonds make nourishing snacks as they contain unsaturated fats

— healthy fats — and oils that strengthen the cardiovascular system, regulate hormonal balance, and keep skin soft and moisturised.

Nuts and seeds also provide vegans and vegetarians with a wholesome source of protein.

Ideally, you should eat them fresh, not roasted or

salted which makes them less healthy.

Sunflower and pumpkin seeds are a powerhouse of nutrients as they contain vitamin E which reduces the risk of heart disease, calcium and magnesium which is important for building strong bones and teeth, and zinc and selenium which are important antioxidants that help to prevent premature ageing.

Cashew nuts contain lots of protein, unsaturated fats and vitamins which is good news for your heart while almonds have the highest level of fibre found in any nut.

Healthy snacking doesn't have to be boring. Try dusting your nuts with chilli powder or paprika to add a touch of spiciness to your snack.

Beans like edamame (fresh soy beans) and chick peas are high in protein. Buy a bag of cooked chick peas from the kachang puih seller and you'll have a nutty snack that's nutritious and low in calories.

Drink to good health

Carbonated drinks can leave your stomach feeling bloated and uncomfortable. Moreover, the high sugar content in these drinks will give you an instant energy boost but leave you feeling ravenous later.

You're much better off drinking the juice of freshly squeezed fruits or smoothies — a creamy blend of milk and fruits — to get your sugar fix. Make your own smoothie with mango, strawberries or banana for a slow, but long-lasting energy boost.

In recent years, low-fat yoghurt has become a favourite snack because the benefits of yoghurt go beyond calcium-rich milk.

Yoghurt contains lactobacillus, a bacteria that assists in making sure your digestive system stays healthy to maximise the nutrients absorbed by your body.

Eat it plain, or dress it with a medley of fruits or a healthy dose of oats.

Not a fan of yoghurt? Then try tau foo fa, the local version of yoghurt. Not only is this smooth treat an absolute delight, it is made from protein and calcium-rich soy beans which benefit the teeth and bones.

Snack attack

The next time hunger strikes, reach out for something that will provide nourishment for your body so you'll have energy to tackle all your daily tasks.

Oatmeal biscuits are the perfect choice because they contain the wholesome goodness of fibre-rich oats combined with nutritious apples and apricots that are loaded with vitamins.

Healthy snacking means munching on food that isn't high in fat, sugar and salt. If you choose baked over fried, seasoned over salted, and fresh over preserved, you won't have to feel guilty about snacking in between meals.

won't have to worry about putting on weight.

If wholemeal sandwiches made with sardine or tuna boré you, get creative with interesting fillings like pineapple and cheese, chicken and avocado or roasted peppers and tomatoes.

