

Snack ATTACK!

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How many times a day do you find yourself reaching for a snack? None? Once? Twice? Constantly? Snacking can be a great way to fight drops in energy, keep your metabolism going and help from overeating at meals. The downside is that many times snacks can add up to a lot of calories that we may not think about but our bodies count towards our daily total calorie intake. This does not mean that you have to stop snacking, but it is important to be aware of when you snack, what you snack on and how much of it you eat.

First, we all eat for reasons other than hunger. Have you reached for a candy bar or chips when you are feeling stressed? What about when you are bored? Angry? Food can provide comfort from the feelings we are having but that may not feel so good. Using food to numb those feelings is a common coping tactic. We also all crave things – mostly sweet or salty. Cravings can also lead to eating more food than intended. The most important thing is to realize when you are eating but not hungry. This acknowledgement of lack of hunger can help short circuit some snacking. Before you reach for that snack, stop and ask yourself “Am I really hungry? Is my stomach rumbling?” If the answer is no or you are not sure, here are some ideas to help you figure out if you really are hungry or eating for other reasons:

- Drink a glass of water. Often, thirst disguises itself as hunger.
- Wait 20 minutes. If you still want a snack after 20 minutes, go ahead – but don’t sit and think about the snack for 20 minutes.
- Take a quick walk. Movement can blunt those snacking tendencies.
- Call a friend or write a page in a journal. Distracting yourself from the thought of snacking can also often eliminate the desire to eat.
- Distract yourself in some other way.

You can try one or more of these ideas to help eliminate eating when you are not really hungry.

You’ve had a glass of water and taken a quick walk, but you still want that chocolate bar or chips – now what? There are three important guidelines for snacking:

- Figure out what you really, really want. Sometimes we reach for the first thing we see – like a bag of chips – and eat some before we decide that isn’t what we really wanted. This can happen several times before we get what we were really wanting or craving while we’ve eaten several hundred calories. By deciding what we really, really want and saying that it is OK to have it, we’re saving the calories we would have eaten before getting our true snack desire.
- Give your snack a beginning and an end. Do not sit down with the whole bag of chips. Put some in a bowl (ideally measure out a serving that is found on the label) then put the bag away. Go to another place and eat your snack so that if you want more, you have to make the decision to go and get it.
- Try to keep your snack under 200 calories. You should be able to satisfy the craving or hunger with about 200 calories without going overboard.

Here are some ideas for snacks:

- Low-fat microwave popcorn in snack pack – regular and kettle corn flavors

- Small piece of fruit and a piece of part-skim string cheese or fat-free, sugar-free yogurt
- One cup of carrots with two tablespoons low fat Ranch dressing
- Low-fat vanilla cone or apple dippers with caramel sauce from McDonald's
- One package of instant oatmeal with sugar substitute and cinnamon
- One and a half cups Cheerios (without milk)