Healthy snacks

This Food Fact Sheet will help you to choose snacks that contribute to a healthy and balanced diet. More information on what a healthy and balanced diet is and how to follow one can be found on the BDA Healthy Eating Food Fact Sheet. The Eatwell Guide shows how much of what we eat overall should come from each food group.

Is snacking bad for you?

Snacking can form part of a balanced, healthy diet when chosen wisely. People often snack for a range of reasons, from hunger to boredom. While some may avoid snacks to prevent weight gain, research suggests snacking can still fit within a healthy diet.

Making poor snack choices can contribute to weight gain and chronic disease, however, spreading energy and nutrient intake across four to five eating occasions each day may help stop overeating at main meals and support your daily fruit and fibre goals.

By choosing well and planning ahead, snacks become a useful part of your lifestyle.

Combine and have fun:

One of the benefits of snacking is that you can mix and match foods to create a wide range of options.

Combining different food groups when snacking adds a wider range of nutrients and creates a more balanced choice. Here are some examples:

- Yoghurt topped with chunks of fresh fruit, mixed nuts and seeds
- A slice of seeded, toasted bread with peanut butter, banana and cinnamon
- Cheese cubes, grapes and crackers
- Half a bagel spread thinly with low-fat cream cheese, topped with cucumber slices and chilli flakes
- Edamame bean salad with grated apple and crumbled feta
- Pepper sticks with roasted beans and paprika
- Frozen grapes rolled in yoghurt and sprinkled with coconut flakes
- Strawberries dipped in ricotta cheese with a drizzle of honey

Food group	Food example
Fruit & vegetables	• Carrot sticks with hummus • Chopped melon • Edamame beans Many fruits and vegetables can be enjoyed fresh, frozen, or freeze-dried for convenience
Starchy carbohydrates	• Fruit scone • A small bowl of cereal • Rice cakes or crackers • Slice of bread
Protein	• Hard-boiled egg • Bean salad • Crunchy roasted chickpeas • Nuts (unsalted where possible)
Dairy & plant-based alternatives	• Natural yoghurt • Cheese • Milk-based fruit smoothie Remember to look for calcium and iodine fortified options if you are choosing plant-based alternatives

What about crisps, chocolates and sweets?

Foods such as crisps, biscuits, chocolate and sweets are often the first things we reach for when we want to snack. However, these choices are typically high in saturated fat, added sugar and salt. They lack fibre and protein and so they do not keep us full for long.



These types of snacks are high in calories, which can easily lead to weight gain. While it is perfectly fine to enjoy the recommended portion size of these foods as an occasional treat, we recommend choosing healthier options as part of a healthy and balanced diet.

When you do choose to have crisps, chocolate or sweets, try smaller portions like mini-bags of crisps or biscuits, mini-size chocolate bars and a small bag of sweets.

Studies show that reducing the amount of less healthy food and snacks you have in the house helps you to eat less of them. If you are unsure whether a snack you are choosing is an everyday or an occasional food, check the food label and follow our 'snack attack' strategies. Healthier choices will always contain less saturated fat, sugar and salt.

'Snack attack' strategies

It's not always just a matter of making healthier choices. If you're really hungry and there are no healthy snacks around, it's very easy to grab something less healthy instead. Make healthy snacking easier with the following strategies:

- When at work keep healthy snacks at your desk or in the office fridge. Fresh fruit or natural yoghurts are great choices.
- If you are going to be out and about, take a healthy snack in your bag. Satsumas, apples, freeze-dried fruits, rice cakes and popcorn are very easy to transport.
- Have a bowl of fruit on display on the kitchen counter and natural yoghurts in the front of the fridge along with chopped vegetable sticks. Keep less healthy snacks behind cupboard doors, so they remain out of sight and out of mind.

Think about your reasons for snacking

- Snack to fuel a workout or to bridge a long gap between meals, rather than out of habit or boredom.
- Don't forget fluids.
- If you feel like snacking, try having a drink first, as thirst is sometimes confused with hunger. For more information on fluids and hydration, see the BDA Fluid and Hydration Fact Sheet.
- Don't try to change all your snacking habits at once. Focus on one specific time, like mid-afternoon or evening, when you feel most tempted by less healthy options.

Top tips

Out of sight, out of mind: Keep less healthy snacks out of the house or stored out of sight. Instead, place nutritious options, like a bowl of fresh fruit, where they are easily visible to encourage healthier choices.

Eat mindfully: Avoid snacking while distracted by your phone, the TV or work. Research indicates that eating while distracted can lead to significantly higher calorie intake during the day.

Engage in sensory eating: Slowing down and focusing on the taste and texture of your food is especially beneficial if you are a naturally fast eater or find yourself eating in a hurry.

Mix and match for variety: Keep snacks interesting by combining different food groups. Pairing fibre-rich carbohydrates with protein or healthy fats (like apple slices with nut butter) provides long-lasting energy.

Become a label reader: Use the nutrition information on food labels to compare products. Look for options lower in saturated fat, salt and added sugars.

Plan ahead: To avoid impulsive purchases, prepare your snacks in advance. Whether you are heading to work or out for the day, having a healthy option ready helps you stay on track.

Reframe 'treats': Reserve less healthy snacks for special occasions. When you do indulge, keep the portion to a recommended portion size.

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If you need to see a dietitian, visit your GP for a referral or bda.uk.com/find-a-dietitian for a private dietitian. You can check your dietitian is registered at hcpc-uk.org.

This Food Fact Sheet and others are available to download free of charge at bda.uk.com/foodfacts

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