



Snacking is on the rise and becoming a more significant part of our overall diets. At first glance, this might seem like a bad thing, but it doesn't have to be.



Defining snacks

You've probably seen headlines that we are snacking more or even heard the term "snackification." Does this mean we are eating more chips? Not necessarily. Most studies that look at how we eat classify eating occasions into two groups - meals and snacks. Meals include breakfast, lunch and dinner and snacks are any other time we eat. So a dessert eaten after dinner or a granola bar while on a hike would both be considered snacks.



Is snacking good or bad?

Snacking itself isn't necessarily good or bad. What and how much we eat is key. If the snacks you choose always come in a bag or a box, you may be getting more sugar and salt than you need. If you snack on fresh fruit, unsalted nuts or yogurt, on the other hand, snacking could be helping you get important nutrients. If you start adding two snacks to your day and still eat your usual meals, you may be getting more calories than you need. If you find that a small late afternoon snack helps to keep you from overdoing it at dinner, then your snacking may be a good thing.



How to snack smarter:

To get the most out of snacking, be smart about what and how much you snack on. Redefining snacks can be a good first step. Anything small, quick and portable can serve as a snack. Skip the snack aisle and look for more healthful options to fill your snacking time. Good choices include fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, yogurt, unsalted nuts and seeds. You can even turn mini-meals into snacks like small sandwiches or salads. Time your snacks for when you need an energy boost. Mid-morning or midafternoon are common times for our energy to dip. A small nourishing snack can give you a little boost and much needed mental break. Don't forget to balance your snacks with your meals. If you find your meals are still the same size after adding snacks into your day, snacking may not be the best strategy for you.

REFERENCES:

1. Kant, Ashima K. et al. 40-Year Trends in Meal and Snack Eating Behaviors of American Adults. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, Volume 115, Issue 1, 50-63

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