

To snack, or not to snack...there lies a question. Eating between meals is extremely common with 96 per cent of us regularly consuming snack foods, according to new research. Why do we reach for a snack? It can be about hunger, but often other factors like boredom, time of day, emotions and mood can influence our in-between meal food choices.

Should we be snacking?

Everyone is different. There is no strong evidence that snacking assists with maintaining a healthy weight. However, planned nutritious snacks can play an important role in contributing to a healthy diet.

A healthy snack can keep your energy levels constant between meals and help you meet your daily nutrient needs. Often, a small snack between meals can prevent you from getting too hungry which can lead to overeating at your next meal.

What types of snacks should I be eating?

Aim to eat snacks that help meet your nutrient needs for the day. Have a snack that satisfies your hunger without being high in kilojoules/calories, fat, salt and sugar but which is full of nutrients.

Foods with a significant amount of protein, or foods high in fibre can help curb hunger. Protein rich are dairy foods like milk, yoghurt and cheese, eggs, nuts, fish, legumes and chicken/meat. High fibre foods are vegetables and legumes, fruit and wholegrains. A good high fibre and protein combination might be cheese and tomato on a wholegrain cracker.

Although it's fine to have a less-than-healthy snack every once in a while, most snacks should consist of nutrient-dense foods like fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, reduced fat dairy and nuts or seeds.

NAQ Nutrition's Top 10 healthy snacks:

1. Small handful unsalted nuts /seeds
2. Grainy crackers topped with avocado or cottage cheese
3. Plain reduced fat yoghurt (can add fresh fruit)
4. Piece of fruit (nature's ultimate healthy snack – get creative with fruit salads and freezing fruit)
5. Small tin of four bean mix or reduced salt baked beans (1/3 cup)
6. Raisin toast with ricotta cheese spread
7. Vegie sticks with healthy dips – hummus, beetroot, tzatziki
8. Small tin canned tuna or salmon
9. Boiled eggs
10. A glass of reduced fat milk

Not all snacks are created equal!

Sometimes, you might need a quick convenient snack and opt for a packaged product.

In these situations, take a look at the nutrition panel and ingredients list to help decide if it's a healthy choice.

Look for snacks that have:

- Less than 3 grams of saturated fat per 100g
- At least 3 grams or more of fibre per serve
- Less than 120mg of sodium per 100g
- Less than 15g of sugar per 100g. Check that sugar or other alternative names for sugar are not listed high on the ingredients list (i.e. dextrose, fructose, sucrose, honey, malt)
- Mainly whole food ingredients with few additives

Most packaged products come in larger serving sizes than we need. A good guide is to keep your serve to less than 600kJ.