



# NUTRITIOUS SNACKS

Snacks can help us meet the nutritional needs that may otherwise go unmet if only consuming three meals per day. Nutrient intake can be improved by including healthy snacks as part of your daily schedule. Learning about proper nutrition and how to read a nutrition facts label can help you make healthy snacking choices.

## Key Terms

- **Cost per Serving** – The cost of one serving of a food item. The cost per serving can be determined by dividing the total cost of a food package by the number of servings indicated on the nutrition facts label.  
Total cost / Total Number of Servings = Cost per Serving
- **Daily Values (DVs)** – The amount of a nutrient needed daily as determined by the Food and Drug Administration.
- **Fiber** – the part of plant foods that cannot be digested. Fiber is beneficial because it reduces the risk of coronary heart disease, reduces constipation and promotes a full feeling.
- **Food Group** – The basic food groups are grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy, and protein.
- **Nutrients** – Substances the body needs to grow and function. The six classes of nutrients are: carbohydrates, protein, fats, water, vitamins and minerals. Carbohydrates, protein and fats are the only three nutrients that provide calories.
- **Nutrient-Dense Foods** – Those that provide substantial amounts of vitamins and minerals and relatively fewer calories.
- **Portion Size** – the amount of food eaten at one time.
- **Serving Size** – A standardized amount of a food, such as a cup or an ounce, used in providing dietary guidance or in making comparisons among similar foods.
- **Whole Grains** – Foods made from the entire grain seed, usually called the kernel, which consists of the bran, germ and endosperm. Nutrients found in whole grains offer protective health benefits such as reducing constipation, aiding in weight management and reducing the risk of heart disease.

## Reading Labels When Making Snack Choices

To know what you're getting from your snack, be sure to read the nutrition facts label. Try these tips to make smart food choices quickly and easily.

- Keep these low: calories, saturated fats, trans fat, cholesterol and sodium
- Get enough of these: potassium, fiber, vitamins A and C, calcium and iron
- Check for added sugars using the ingredient list.
- Use the % Daily Value (DV) column when possible: 5% DV or less is low, 20% DV or more is high

Additional items to look for on a Nutrition Facts Label include:

- **Serving size:** Look at the serving size and the number of servings per package. Then, determine how many servings you are actually consuming. If you double the servings you eat, you double the calories and nutrients. Remember, the serving size provided on the nutrition facts label is not a recommended amount to eat; it's a way to let you know the calories and nutrients in a certain amount of food.
- **Calories:** 2,000 calories is the value used as a general reference on the food label. However, the amount of calories you need each day depends on your age, gender, activity level and whether you are trying to gain, maintain or lose weight. Be sure to look at the serving size and how many servings you are actually consuming. If you double the servings you eat, you double the calories.

You can easily consume your calories on a few high-calorie food items, but you most likely will not get the vitamins and nutrients your body needs. Instead, choose nutrient-rich foods that are packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber and other nutrients but are lower in calories.

Look at the calories on the label and compare them with what nutrients you are also getting to decide whether the food is worth eating. When one serving of a single food items contains 400 or more calories, it is high; 40 calories is low.



Food packages also contain information about the amount of calories in the food, including various claim, such as:

Calorie free – means there is less than 5 calories per serving.

Low calorie – means there is 40 calories or less per serving.

Reduced calorie or lower in calories – means there is at least 25 percent fewer calories than the regular version.

Light or lite – means there is half the fat or a third of the calories of the regular version.

**Remember that calories come from both food and beverages, so make your calories count!**

- **Sugars:** Since sugars contribute calories with few, if any, nutrients, look for foods and beverages low in added sugars. The Nutrition Facts label lists how many grams of sugar the food contains, but does not list added sugars separately. The amount listed includes sugars that are naturally present in foods and sugars added to the food during processing or preparation. Although the body’s response to sugars does not depend on whether they are naturally present in food or added to foods, sugars found naturally in foods are part of the food’s total package of nutrients and other healthful components. In contrast, many foods that contain added sugars often supply calories, but few or no essential nutrients and no dietary fiber.

Read the ingredient list and make sure that added sugars are not one of the first few ingredients. Some names for added sugars (caloric sweeteners) include sucrose, glucose, high fructose corn syrup, corn syrup, corn sweetener, honey, dextrose, fruit juice concentrates, lactose, maltose, malt syrup, molasses, maple syrup and fructose. These added sugars provide calories but few or no vitamins and minerals.

The food package can also provide guidance. Sometimes the label will say “sugar-free” or “no added sugars.” Even with these claims, it is important to read the Nutrition Facts label.

- **Fats:** Look for foods low in saturated fats, trans fats and cholesterol to help reduce the risk of heart disease. Most of the fats you eat should be polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. There is no % DV for trans fat, but you should aim to keep trans fat intake as low as possible. Remember, keep your total fat intake between 20% to 35% of calories (25% to 35% for children and adolescents 4 to 18 years of age). Foods that are high in fats are usually high in calories.

Many food packages also contain various claims regarding the amount of fat in the food. Some examples of these claims are “fat free,” “low saturated fat” or “light.”

- **Sodium:** Sodium is an essential nutrient and is needed by the body in relatively small quantities, provided that substantial sweating does not occur. Reducing sodium intake can reduce one’s blood pressure. Keeping blood pressure in normal range reduces an individual’s risk of cardiovascular disease, congestive heart failure, and kidney disease.

The adequate intake (AI) levels of sodium for individuals ages 9 to 50 years is 1,500 mg per day. For adolescents and adults of all ages (14 years and older), the tolerable upper intake level is 2,300 mg per day. Research shows that eating less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium (about 1 tsp of salt) per day may reduce the risk of high blood pressure. Most of the sodium people eat comes from processed foods, not from the salt shaker. Take a look at the sodium content on the Nutrition Facts label, using it to make selections that are lower in sodium. Use the % DV to determine the levels of sodium in the food product – 5% DV or less is low and 20% DV or more is considered high.

Claims on the food packaging, such as “low sodium,” can also be used to quickly identify foods that contain less salt. However, such claims should still prompt a look at the Nutrition Facts label.

**Nutritious Snacking Tips**

- Choose foods high in nutrients and low in fat.
- Eat snacks that include at least two food groups. For example, pair apple slices with cheese or a mini bagel with peanut butter.
- Plan ahead! Plan and pack snacks for when you are on the go so you can avoid less healthful snack choices such as chips and soda.
- Incorporate fruits and vegetables into your snacking plans.
- Aim for whole grain snacks, as at least half of your grains should be whole.
- Remember that calories come from both food and beverages. Water and milk are your best beverage choices at snack time.



**References and Resources**

[www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. (2011). Let's Eat For The Health Of It. Publication Number: HHS-ODPHP-2010-01-DGA-B.

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