

Are You Having a Snack Attack? If Not, You Should!

By Kim LaPiana, MS, RD, Sports Nutritionist

Snacking is a part of life for Americans, however, we often beat ourselves up for between meal nibbling. Sometimes we have good reasons to avoid snacking. Many of us often snack on easily obtained high-calorie, high-fat foods (vending machines), then we skimp on meals. The end result often being that our overall nutrition comes up short and most likely too long on calories.

Snack Attack Guidelines

Choose a variety of snacks in a variety of colors

Include both carbohydrate and protein in your snack selection

Eat snack portions

Match snack calories to your activity level

Plan ahead for smart snacking For coaches and gym staff, snacks should be a priority in your day. The long hours spent at the gym motivating, encouraging and teaching others drains your mind and body of energy. One way to keep working and being your best is to take a quick snack break. A snack will help to take the edge off and keep a smile on your face.

If you spend more than four hours at the gym at one time, it's likely you are missing a meal. In this case, two balanced snacks eaten every 2-3 hours will help you both physically and emotionally.

Carefully chosen snacks promote good health and add pleasure to life. Snacking is also the perfect way to get your 5-9 servings of fruit and vegetables every day. They help to supply needed nutrients such as vitamins A, C and fiber. Without snacks it's virtually impossible to reach this important nutrition goal. It's also a perfect time to bone up on calcium, one of the most important nutrients we are often lacking. Women need 3 to 4 servings of high calcium foods (milk, cheese, yogurt) each day. Men need 3 servings a day.

Well-balanced snacks are a perfect way to satisfy mid-morning or later-afternoon hunger. Snacks at these times also help to control your lunch or dinner portion sizes. It's never a good idea to feel like you're starving before meals because the tendency to make poor choices and overeat is much greater.

So what are "carefully chosen" and "well balanced" snacks? These are ones that contain carbohydrates, color (red, yellow, green, orange) and a protein source. Carbohydrates are well known as our energy food. We are well aware that gymnastics coaches need plenty of energy! We can get carbohydrates from cereals, grains, starches, milk, yogurt, fruit and vegetables. That's where the color comes in. By including colorful foods, we are adding low calorie, nutrient dense foods that will improve our overall nutrition for the day. Colorful foods also create a much more desirable snack.

By including a protein source as part of our snacks, blood sugar levels are longer lasting, therefore giving us more energy for a longer period of time. Blood sugar is first raised by the carbohydrate from our snack. Simple carbohydrates like those from fruit, milk and yogurt do not have to be broken down, so they enter our blood much faster than complex carbohydrates, like those in crackers, breads and starches. When blood sugar levels decline, about half of the protein in the snack will be used to raise or maintain blood sugar levels. Without the protein in the snack, your bodies physiologic response from the carbohydrate will not be optimal, but short lived.

Should you avoid foods with fat in them for snacks? No, not necessarily. Fat provides satiety or a feeling of fullness. Fat also provides us with essential fatty acids and several fat soluble vitamins (vitamins A, D, E, & K) that our bodies depend on daily. Lowfat dairy products, eggs and peanut butter are excellent sources of these nutrients when eaten in moderation. The snacks you should avoid are those that provide little to no nutrient value like: chips, candy, soft drinks, fruit drinks (not juice), French fries, and doughnuts. For an occasional treat, swing by your local coffeehouse and skip the caffeine. It's the nutrition that you really need to make your body feel good. How about trying this: 1 cup of steamed nonfat milk with cinnamon or nutmeg, and 1 chocolate covered graham cracker.

Remember: Brown counts as a color in emergency situations!

SMART SNACKS

1. 1-2 ounces reduced fat cheddar cheese
6 cracked wheat crackers
1 small pear
2. 8-10 peanut butter and pretzels
2 tablespoon dried cranberries
3. 1 piece string cheese
handful of baby carrots
4. 1 container of yogurt
cantaloupe wedge
5. 6-8 ounces chocolate 1% or nonfat milk
1 small banana
6. Half toasted bagel
2 teaspoon peanut butter
15 grapes
7. 1/2 cup cottage cheese
2 tablespoon salsa
cut red and green pepper strips
8. Peanut butter and jelly sandwich
small apple
9. Hard boiled egg
Low sodium V-8 juice
10. Half toasted pita, cut into wedges
hummus dip
orange
11. Veggie Sandwich
Pita bread
Peppers, cucumber, baby spinach leaves
kidney beans or garbanzo beans

- 1 tablespoon cream cheese
- 12. Fruit Smoothie 10-12 ounces
 - 1/2 cup frozen fruit (mangos, strawberries, peaches)
 - 6-8 ounces nonfat milk or yogurt
 - 2-3 ounces 100% fruit juice
 - put it in the freezer and eat with a spoon

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