



# SCALE BACK ON SNACKS WITH NO NUTRITIONAL VALUE

Learning how to recognize snacks with no nutritional value can help you make healthier choices. When a food or drink provides primarily calories with no nutrition benefits, that snack is known to have “empty calories”. Empty calories are in foods and drinks that are high in sugar, fat, sodium, and oil, including alcohol-containing beverages.

## Let’s Talk About Snacking

Snacking is anytime you consume food or beverages between regular meals. Remember that a snack should be a mini meal, just a little something to hold you over until the next meal. Snacking has developed a “bad image,” but snacks can be an important part of your diet. They can provide energy in the middle of the day or after a workout to refuel the body. A healthy snack between meals can also decrease your hunger and keep you from overeating at mealtime.

## What Makes a Healthy Snack?

If you’re not sure your snack is a good choice read the Nutritional Facts label. Pay attention to the serving size given on the label and the amount of calories in a serving. A snack should be about 200 calories or less per serving but don’t make your decision solely on calorie count alone. Choose snacks that contain nutrients like fiber, calcium, iron, potassium, or vitamin D. No label handy? You can never go wrong with grabbing fresh fruits or vegetables for a delicious, nutritious snack.

## When to Snack

Going too long without food (more than 2-3 hours) can slow your metabolism down and lead to making poor food and beverage

choices. Healthful snacking is one way to prevent that. But it’s important to listen to your body for hunger signs. Are you snacking because you’re bored or feeling stressed? Or is it because you have low energy and your stomach is growling? Some bodies work best when they eat small, frequent, snack-like meals to keep them going throughout the day. Other bodies do just fine with 3 balanced meals a day.

## How to Snack

A snack should be the right size and a good balance between enough calories to satisfy you, but still not too many to promote consuming empty calories. Snacks should be enjoyable, easy to prepare, filling, and nutritious. Foods that are high in fiber, which contain carbohydrates for quick fuel, or which contain protein for satiety are good choices. Make it a habit to check the label (whenever possible) to get a better sense of the ingredients in the foods you are eating. Pick foods that are low in added fat and sugar and high in fiber and pick water to drink.

## 5 healthy snacks under 200 calories:

- 2 cups of plain popcorn
- ¼ cup of almonds or nuts
- Apple slices with peanut butter
- Baked chips
- 1 medium banana

**INCLUSION MATTERS:** Plan your healthy snacks ahead of time and remember to eat between meals if you are hungry! Get the most out of this snack time by choosing foods that provide energy

and good nutrition. Use a smartphone app or ask a friend or caregiver to assist with reading nutrition labels to make informed choices. [nchpad.org/1437/6342/Snacking~Made~Healthy](https://nchpad.org/1437/6342/Snacking~Made~Healthy)

**FAMILY MATTERS:** Do your kids ever have a Snack Attack? Sometimes kids (and adults too) binge on snacks rather than eating a meal because they are overly hungry or in a hurry. These snacks are typically unhealthy and not to mention, messy (cheese curls are the worst!). Help your child avoid grazing on unhealthy snacks throughout the day by establishing a set snack time and meal time. Otherwise, grazing will interfere with hunger cues and could potentially sabotage the intake of a healthy, balanced meal.

## LINKS:

**Choosing snacks from a vending machine? Make a Good Choice!** <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/npa/vending-machines.html>

**Healthy snacking:** <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/add-color/healthy-snacking>

**What does a healthy snack look like?:** [thewholeu.uw.edu/2017/03/20/what-does-a-healthy-snack-look-like/](http://thewholeu.uw.edu/2017/03/20/what-does-a-healthy-snack-look-like/)