

Volunteer Leader Training Guide

Making Your Snacks Work for You

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Introduction

Snacking is a part of our way of life. Many think snacks are junk food, though it doesn't have to be that way. Snacking can be part of a balanced diet. Since most adults eat snacks, it is important to be able to choose snacks that are more nutritious and better for you. Any food that is eaten between meals is considered a snack. Eating small portions between meals provides your body with energy to keep you going throughout the day. The right kind of snack can be healthy. Calories and nutritional value should be considered when choosing snacks. The Nutrition Facts Label on packaged foods will help you figure the calories and nutrients in a one-portion size. Foods chosen for snacks should be planned as part of the total day's intake to supplement the food eaten at meals. Many foods are now packaged in single-serving portions, making it easier for you to keep track of how much you are eating. However, you still want to be careful about what kinds of food you choose to snack on.

When the terms "empty calorie food" and "junk food" are used, they refer to foods high in calories and low in nutritive value. The snacks chosen from this group often are high in sugar, fat and salt and have little nutritional value. Purchased convenience snacks can be expensive when compared to foods of similar food value because of the method of preparation and the convenience of the product.

Snacking becomes a problem when too many low-nutrition, high-calorie foods are substituted for well-balanced meals. Sugary and fattening sweets like cookies and candy lack nutrients. Many salty foods – like chips – can dehydrate you. Remember, these foods should be eaten in moderation.

Target Audiences

- EHC leaders
- Adult audiences

Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Tell the importance of healthy snacks.
- Choose snacks for different reasons and consider the reasons.
- Tell how to enjoy snacks without overdoing on the amount.
- Tell about empty calories and why they are important.
- Tell how to make smart choices with MyPyramid.

Main Teaching Points

- What are snacks?
- What snacks are nutrient-rich yet low in fat and easy to make?
- How can you snack for good health without giving up foods you like?
- Tips for healthy snacks.
- What are empty calories?
- Making smart choices from MyPyramid's Food Groups.

Handouts

- Activity 1: Snack Quiz
- Handout 1: Healthy Snacks
- Handout 2: Quick and Easy Snacks Based on Calorie Levels
- Activity 2: Healthy Snacks Scramble Puzzle – Page 1
- Healthy Snacks Scramble Puzzle Answers – Page 2
- Activity 3: Create Your Own Snacks

Suggestions for Teaching

- Review the lesson introduction and study the major teaching points.
- Make copies of :
 - Activity 1: Snack Quiz
 - Handout 1: Healthy Snacks
 - Handout 2: Quick and Easy Snacks Based on Calorie Levels
 - Activity 2: Healthy Snacks Scramble Puzzle – Page 1
 - Healthy Snacks Scramble Puzzle Answers – Page 2
 - Activity 3: Create Your Own Snacks

Icebreaker

“**Favorite Snack Poll**” – Ask participants to write their favorite “healthy” snack on a piece of paper. Have the participants read their favorite healthy snack out loud. On a blackboard or large sheet of paper, write their answers so everyone can see each other’s favorite snacks. Count and see which snacks were popular choices.

Look at these snacks, and divide them into those that are healthy and those that we should eat less often.

Ask the participants to think of other snack foods that would be healthy (fruits, vegetables, low-fat dips, low-fat yogurt, pudding made with skim milk, whole grain breads, crackers, cereal, pasta, etc.).

What Are Snacks?

Activity 1: Snack Quiz. Conduct Activity 1. Have participants answer questions and discuss as a group.

Snacks are foods or drinks you have between meals. Eating snacks between meals can be a part of a healthy lifestyle if you choose healthy snacks that are high in fiber and low in fat, sugar and salt.

Not everyone needs snacks. Your need for snacks or more food depends on your age, health, weight and activity level. Snacking often, but not continuously, can help people with small appetites meet their nutritional needs. Eating food often is also important for anyone who has an active lifestyle through work or exercise.

Many people who are trying to lose weight find they are more successful if they have small, healthy snacks between meals. Eating snacks with fiber can also make you feel full for a longer time.

What Snacks Are Nutrient-Rich Yet Low in Fat and Easy to Make?

Each of these snacks counts toward servings from two or three food groups.

- ❖ Ultra easy, no fuss
 - Yogurt, topped with fruit and nuts
 - Baked tortilla chips, sliced cucumbers or summer squash with salsa
 - Baby carrots
 - Two or more 100% juices mixed in one glass
- ❖ Easy, minor preparation
 - Ice cream sandwich made with oatmeal cookies
 - Microwave noodle soup mixed with corn or other vegetables, topped with cheese
 - Peanut butter sandwich with banana slices or grated carrot
 - Cut-up fruit in an unsugared ice cream cone
- ❖ A little more effort
 - Fruit smoothie made with yogurt, low-fat ice cream or frozen yogurt, fruit, milk
 - Ham and lettuce rolled up in a soft tortilla
 - Raw, chopped veggies and sliced cheese or lean meat, tucked in pita bread with a little salad dressing drizzled on top
 - Microwaved potato, topped with salsa or shredded cheese

How Can You Snack for Good Health Without Giving Up Foods You Like?

- ❖ If you snack on foods that have some fat or sugar, no problem. Try this:
 - Just keep the amount you eat sensible in size: perhaps eat less, share with a friend, or eat them less often.
 - Substitute one snack for a version with less fat or added sugar; for example, fat-free chips for regular chips, frozen yogurt for ice cream or a bagel for a doughnut.
 - Rather than snack right from the package, put your snack on a plate; that way you won't eat too much. That's good advice no matter what you eat!
- ❖ Move more; sit less. By moving more, you won't need to be concerned as much about overdoing on snacking. Doing something active may even take the place of sitting and snacking.

Tips for Healthy Snacks

The challenge with snacking is deciding what kinds of food to snack on – and how much.

- ❖ Plan healthy snacks and meals by using MyPyramid.
- ❖ Limit snacks to no more than three a day.
- ❖ For snacks, buy small packages of food or take small portions from larger packages.
- ❖ Try to include food from two of the food groups for each snack.
- ❖ Choose fruits and vegetables, low-fat milk products and grain products more often.
- ❖ Try not to snack from the box – take out the amount you want to eat and put the box away.
- ❖ Whole fruit is a better choice than juice. If you are thirsty, have water with snacks.
- ❖ Avoid snacking while watching TV or driving.

Distribute **Handout 1** and discuss (**Handout 1: Healthy Snacks**).

What Are Empty Calories?

Empty calories are foods high in sugar or fat but low in essential nutrients. While these foods provide significant calories, they offer little or no nutritional value. There are basically two empty-calorie culprits in our diets: 1) foods with lots of sugar or other sweeteners and 2) foods with lots of fat and oil.

1. Foods With Lots of Sugar or Other Sweeteners

Americans are eating more sugar than ever before. The USDA has stated the average American, who consumes about 2,000 calories per day, can eat up to 10 teaspoons of added sugars, only if he or she eats a healthful diet containing all the recommended servings of fruits, dairy products and other foods. In fact, though, the average American is not eating that healthful diet and consumes 20 teaspoons per day of sugar. The average American consumes at least 64 pounds of sugar per year.

Here are some of the top five food categories that contribute to individuals’ empty calories.

Foods	Average number of teaspoons of sugar (or equivalent) per serving
Soda and sweetened beverages (mostly carbonated soft drinks, but also includes fruit “drinks” and “ades” and bottle iced teas)	9 teaspoons per 12-ounce serving of soda; 12 teaspoons per 12-ounce serving of fruit drink or ade
Cakes, cookies, pastries and pies	6 teaspoons in 1/16 of a pie or frosted cake
Sugar or sugar substitute blends such as syrups, honey, molasses and sweet toppings	3 teaspoons per tablespoon of syrup or honey
Candy	3 teaspoons per 1-ounce chocolate bar
Frozen milk desserts (includes ice cream and frozen yogurt)	3 teaspoons per 1/2 cup

So, besides staying away from soda or limiting soda, be sure to watch for sneaky sugar calories from these items:

- **Other sweetened drinks.** Lemonades, sports drinks and fruit drinks.
- **Fancy coffee and tea drinks (hot or cold).** These drinks can be loaded with sugar calories.
- **Snack cakes, pastries and breakfast/cereal bars.** Toaster pastries, granola bars and breakfast bars fall into this category. One little toaster pastry has around 200 calories and almost 5 teaspoons of sugar.
- **Sweetened hot and cold cereals.** Check out the labels before you buy your breakfast cereals; they list the grams of added sugar per serving. A packet of flavored instant oatmeal contains around 150 calories and around 4 teaspoons of sugar! Sugar is usually the second ingredient listed in the ingredient list.
- **Condiments.** Pancake syrup and even catsup can add on the sugar calories if you are heavy handed. A 1/4 cup serving of pancake syrup has about 210 calories and 10 teaspoons of sugar and 1/4 cup catsup contains around 60 calories and 4 teaspoons of sugar!

2. Foods With Lots of Fat and Oil

Although some fats and oils contain vitamins and important fatty acids, such as omega-3 fatty acids and monounsaturated fats, foods loaded with fats and oils are often empty-calorie culprits. This is particularly true when the food is full of trans fats and saturated fats; deep-fried French fries, potato chips and high-fat crackers made with white flour are all examples of empty-calorie foods.

Here are some of the top high-fat, empty-calorie culprits:

- **Chips and microwave popcorn.** Although the potato and corn kernels that go into making these popular snack items have some nutritional value, once you coat them in partially hydrogenated oil, they top the charts in calories and fat grams.
- **Crackers.** Crackers may seem like they would be good snack choices, but if you look on the ingredient labels, they're usually just white flour with partially hydrogenated fat – neither of which does much for the nutritional value or your diet. Calories and fat can add up quickly here, too.
- **Packaged frozen snacks.** Walk down the frozen-food aisle and you'll find scores of packaged savory snacks just waiting to be popped into the microwave: hot pockets, pizza rolls, egg rolls, etc. Trouble is these are full of partially hydrogenated fats and oils.

It's easy to substitute healthier foods for empty calories. For example:

Instead of	Try
Sugary soft drinks	A glass of water
Cookies, cake or pie	A low-fat granola bar
Potato or nacho chips	Pretzels or air-popped popcorn
Candy bar	Low-fat trail mix
Ice cream	Frozen yogurt, sorbet or sherbet
Any of the above	A piece of fresh fruit
White bread	Whole-wheat bread

Distribute Handout 2 and discuss. (**Handout 2: Quick and Easy Snacks Based on Calorie Levels**).

Making Smart Choices From MyPyramid's Food Groups

When making snack choices, consider MyPyramid as a guide to pick the right choices for you.

Grains: Make Half Your Grains Whole – What's in the Grain Group? Any food made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley or another cereal grain. "Whole grains" include whole-wheat flour, bulgur (cracked wheat), oatmeal, whole cornmeal and brown rice.

- Get a whole grain head start with oatmeal or whole grain cereal.
- Change it up. Make your sandwich on 100% whole wheat or oatmeal bread. Snack on popcorn or whole grain crackers.

Vegetables: Vary Your Veggies – What's in the Vegetables Group? Any vegetable or 100% vegetable juice. Vegetables may be raw or cooked, fresh, frozen, canned or dried/dehydrated.

- It's easy going dark green. Add frozen chopped spinach, collard greens or turnip greens to a pot of soup.
- For a healthy snack, try crunchy broccoli florettes or red pepper strips.

Fruits: Focus on Fruits – What's in the Fruit Group? Any fruit or 100% fruit juice. Fruits may be fresh, canned, frozen or dried and may be whole, cut-up, puréed, raw or cooked.

- Bag some fruit for your morning commute. Toss in an apple to munch with lunch and some raisins to satisfy you at snacktime.
- Never be fruitless! Stock up on peaches, pears and apricots canned in lite fruit juice, water or frozen so they're always on hand.

Milk: Get Your Calcium-Rich Foods – What's in the Milk Group? All fluid milk products and many foods made from milk. Examples include cheese and yogurt. Make your Milk Group choices fat-free or low-fat.

- Snack on low-fat or fat-free yogurt. Try it as a dip for fruits and veggies and a topper for baked potatoes.
- Order your latte or hot chocolate with fat-free (skim) milk.

Meat and Beans: Go Lean With Protein – What's in the Meat and Beans Group? All foods made from beef, pork, poultry, fish, dry beans or peas, eggs, nuts and seeds. Make your meat and poultry choices lean or low-fat.

- Trim visible fat from meat and remove skin from poultry.
- Broil, grill, roast or poach meat, poultry or fish instead of frying.

Oils: Know Your Fats – Oils are fats that are liquid at room temperature such as canola, corn and olive oils. Mayonnaise and certain salad dressings are made with oils. Nuts, olives, avocados and some fish such as salmon are naturally rich in oils.

- Toss salad with salad oil and flavored vinegar.
- Try dried nuts as a snack.

Conduct the following activities:

- **Activity 2: Healthy Snacks Scramble Puzzle.** Conduct Activity 2.
- **Activity 3: Create Your Own Snacks.** Conduct Activity 3. Have participants do the activity and discuss as a group.

References

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