Tips for healthier snacking

Sources: Heather Norman-Burgdolf and Courtney Luecking, extension specialists in food and nutrition

When we are at home, it can be tempting to visit the refrigerator or scour the cabinets several times a day in search of a snack. Overtime, if we make unhealthy snacking decisions like choosing high fat, sweet or salty foods over nutritious options, these calories can add up into unwanted weight gain. Here are some tips to help you and your family snack smarter.

First, snacking is completely normal and healthy for all ages. Snacking supports healthy growth and development in children. Children should have two to three snacks each day. Adults can use snacking to increase their daily intake of necessary nutrients that are often lacking at mealtime. Depending on your activity level, it is fine for adults to have one to two snacks each day.

One of the keys to healthy snacking is to make sure you choose nutritious foods like fruits, vegetables, seeds and nuts over high fat and high salt snacks. When you snack, choose items from more than one food group. This increases the likelihood of those snacks being high in fiber or protein, both of which make you feel fuller longer. For example, a banana and a handful of almonds will keep your appetite in check longer than just eating a banana. You can get creative with your snack combinations. Examples of foods that are high in fiber include whole fruit, vegetables and whole grains. Cheese, plain yogurt, nuts and beans are foods that are high in protein.

If you find yourself at home more these days, it may be a good idea to snack during a set time, like you do for your meals. Having a predictable snacking schedule will help you keep from eating throughout the day. You may even choose a set location to eat your snacks, like the kitchen counter or dining room table. Avoid snacking in front of the television, as watching TV can distract you from noticing when you are full, which can lead to overeating.

You can even portion out or make your snacks in advance to make them more convenient to grab than unhealthier items. Also, it is perfectly normal and fine for you to look forward to your snacks each day.

When you snack, be sure to drink a glass of water. The water will help keep you hydrated and leave you feeling satisfied.

For more information on raising healthy families, contact the (COUNTY NAME) office of the UK Cooperative Extension Service.

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