



Heart-Healthy Snacks That Taste Good Too

February is a celebration of matters of the heart. Love is in the air this month, so remember to love yourself and take good care of your health. Avoid overeating or going hungry between meals by eating nutritious meals and snacks. Eating three small, well-balanced meals and two or three nutritious snacks are good ways to protect your health and your heart.

Research shows that people who eat a healthy breakfast, lunch and dinner along with two or three healthy snacks are less likely to overeat and gain weight. Avoid foods with lots of simple carbohydrates (sugars) like candy bars or soda. Healthy snacks contain complex carbohydrates like whole-grain breads and cereals. Combining complex carbohydrates with protein-rich foods such as low-fat yogurt, peanut butter or low-fat cheese creates a satisfying snack.

Read food labels and check the nutrition facts information on packaged snacks. Just because something is labeled as “low fat,” “all natural” or “pure” doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s nutritious. Many low-fat snacks contain unhealthy amounts of sugar and as many calories as full-fat snacks. Do the math when reading the serving size information on the label, as most snack foods are meant to be two or more servings. You may need to double or triple the listed amount of fat, calories or sugar to get an accurate caloric count.

The best way to avoid eating junk food and save money is to make your own snacks at home. Keep plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables refrigerated in small, sealed plastic bags, ready to grab and go. Whole-wheat pretzels, baked tortilla chips and rice cakes are delicious with low-fat toppings like spicy mustard or salsa. Spice up air-popped popcorn with a little cayenne

pepper or garlic powder. Dried fruit like raisins or cranberries mixed with walnuts and whole-grain cereal are easy to pack in small plastic bags for a quick and healthy homemade trail mix.

If you love chocolate like I do, 2 ounces of dark chocolate or an 8-ounce mug of hot chocolate are healthier snacks than a milk chocolate candy bar. Nonfat frozen yogurt or sorbet contain half the calories and are a better substitute for ice cream.

These heart-healthy recipes will ensure that you’ll avoid fattening junk food while enjoying a satisfying and nutritious mid-meal snack.



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SPICY ROASTED CHICKPEAS

This high protein snack is low in fat and high in flavor!

- 1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas or garbanzo beans
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1. Heat oven to 400 F.
2. Using a colander, rinse and drain the chickpeas, shaking the colander to remove as much liquid as possible. Place the chickpeas on a rimmed baking pan. 3. Sprinkle the chickpeas with the olive oil and shake the pan to coat the chickpeas with oil. Season the chickpeas with the cumin, chili powder, salt and cayenne pepper. Shake the pan to coat the chickpeas with the spices.
4. Bake for 10 minutes. Shake the pan and return the chickpeas to the oven for another 10 minutes or until crispy.

FRUITY CHEESE BREAD

- 2 slices dense, multigrain bread
- 1 tablespoon low-fat cream cheese

- 8 blueberries or 6 peach, apple, banana or strawberry slices or a mixture of all
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter or nut butter
- 1 teaspoon honey

1. Place the slices of bread on a plate. Spread with a thin layer of the cream cheese. Top evenly with the fruit.

2. Place the peanut butter or nut butter and the honey in a small, microwave-safe bowl and mix well. Heat on high for 15 seconds or until the peanut butter melts.

3. Drizzle the nut butter mixture over the fruit. Cut the fruity cheese bread in half and then into quarters. Serve immediately. Serves 2.

CINNAMON APPLE CHIPS

- 4 Granny Smith or other tart apples
- 2 tablespoons stevia or sugar substitute
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- Nonstick, butter-flavored cooking spray

1. Heat oven to 250 F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper or aluminum foil.

2. Slice the apple into four sections. Cut out the core and the seeds. Slice the apples as thinly as possible. The slices don’t have to be uniform.

3. Place the sugar and cinnamon in a large bowl and mix well. Add the apple slices and toss until most of both sides of the apples are well coated. Place the apples, in a single layer, onto the baking sheets. Spray the apples with the cooking spray.

4. Bake for 1 hour, stir and spray the apples with more of the cooking spray. Continue baking until the apples are lightly browned and crisp, about 1 hour.

5. Set aside to cool and then transfer the apple crisps into an airtight jar or a sealable plastic bag.

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