



Healthy “Portable” Snacks to Keep You on the Go

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When it comes to nutritious eating, the words “healthy” and “quick” usually don’t go together. With busy schedules and everyone on the go, go, go many of us are in the habit of grabbing pre-packaged and over-processed snacks in order to fill in the time between meals. Kids are especially vulnerable to poor quality snacks from vending machines or convenience stores.

A few years ago I found myself in this same situation and operating in a “grab and go” mode left me nutrient deprived, unsatisfied, and the spikes and dips in my energy levels were not fun. I decided to do something about it. With several weeks of research, trial and error, and reading a lot of labels, I came up with what I call my Healthy “Portable” Snacks list.

Importance of Maintaining Energy throughout the Day

Whether you are at school, work, exercising, or running errands, food choices directly affect the body’s energy systems. Whenever we eat, a complex chain of chemical events is kicked off and the liver and pancreas ultimately decide how carbohydrates, proteins, and some fats are used and stored. In the case of carbohydrates and proteins, insulin from the pancreas is released in the body to help regulate energy levels. Overeating or not eating enough causes spikes and dips in insulin levels and ultimately impacts our overall energy levels, moods, and ability to concentrate.

Combining carbohydrates and proteins (example: bread and milk) slows insulin response and the digestion process and gives your body a more even supply of energy.

Healthy Snacks Criteria

My criteria for healthy portable snacks are two-fold:

1. The snacks must be portable for “on the go” convenience and they either do not require refrigeration or can be kept in a cooler with a small ice block. If hot water is required, it can be added from the tap.
2. The snacks have to be whole foods or foods that have minimal processing, and if it comes in a package the ingredients list must be short and contain words I actually know and understand (for example: only apples in apple sauce, no additional sweeteners). It is critical to read labels – do not assume a particular food choice is healthy!

Snacks List – A Sample

Any of these foods can be mixed and matched to provide a good carbohydrate and protein combination.

- Apple sauce with granola
- Apple sauce with cottage cheese

- Bagel or toast with nut butter
- Cheese and crackers
- Chocolate milk
- Fig/fruit Newton cookies and milk
- Fruits or vegetables
- Oatmeal Snackeys (recipe below)**
- Oatmeal packets – instant, add dried fruit or nuts
- Popcorn and juice*
- Pretzels and juice*
- Soup – dried or instant
- Trail mix of nuts or dried fruit
- Tortillas filled with your favorite fixings – as simple as diced potatoes, raw veggies, salsa, etc.
- Yogurt (plain) with fresh fruit (add your own fruit for better taste and less sugar)

Notes:

There are vegetarian/vegan options for everything listed above.

*Use real fruit juice but cut it 50:50 with water to help prevent spikes in insulin levels.

**Oatmeal Snackeys: Mix ½ cup honey, ½ cup nut butter, 1 cup dried milk, 1 cup oatmeal. Option to add dried fruit, nuts, chocolate chips, coconut, etc.

Getting Started

The key to changing any habit is to start slow, replace existing habits with new habits, and be consistent. Pick or create 2-3 healthy portable snacks to incorporate into your weekly routine. If you are providing snacks for family members, start with foods they already enjoy, get their input up front, and their feedback too. And if you are making significant snack changes such as replacing Cheetos with granola and yogurt, keep in mind it can take up to 4 weeks before taste buds readjust themselves to the new taste and cravings for sugar and fat decline.

Changing eating habits can be hard so start small and stick with it. Before you know it, you and your family will be snacking on the go and everyone's bodies will be happier!

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