Eating smaller, frequent meals throughout the day is a great way to boost your metabolism while preventing overeating due to hunger. If you are someone who goes more than five hours between meals, then adding a healthy snack may help curb cravings and will provide more energy throughout the day.

Of course, it does matter on what you choose to snack. Eating sugary, high-fat, low-fiber foods will cause weight gain instead of weight loss. When selecting healthy snacks it is important to think about the time of day, when the next meal will be, and what activities you are doing. For example, it’s late in the afternoon and you are hungry. You plan to exercise before heading home. Dinner is at least three hours away—you need a snack! Choosing a sensible snack that is low in fat, high in complex carbohydrates, and has some protein added to it is a wise choice. Picking a sugary candy bar or a bag of chips will not provide a good balance and may cause you to want to snack again while making dinner, or overeat during mealtime. Put your snacking sleuth hat on and let’s do some detective work to see what constitutes a healthy snack option.

**Read the Label:** healthy snacks should contain whole-grain ingredients, limited amounts of fat (under 5 grams per serving), no trans fats, and small amounts of protein. Snack foods should have a good source of fiber (either from fruits or vegetables or from whole grains).

**Detect Claims that Are Too Good to Be True:** some foods may be labeled as “natural” or “pure” or “a good source of whole grains,” but may also be a source of excess amounts of sugar and empty calories. For example, children’s cereals are often labeled as a “good source of whole grains”—which is true—but these types of cereal are also high in sugar.

**Low-Fat Debate:** Some foods are modified to be lower in fat than their originals. Be leery of over-consuming these foods as they may have extra sugar added to help with flavor. Read the total calories per serving and compare to the original. If the lower-fat option is not all that much lower in calories, it may not be a good substitute.

**Identify Why You Are Hungry:** Are you bored? Are you eating to meet an emotional need? Are you dehydrated? These are some questions to ask yourself when you feel a snack attack coming on. If you are truly hungry, then aim to make a healthy food choice such as:

- Homemade trail mix (dried fruit, nuts, whole-grain cereal)
- Cereal and milk
- High-fiber, low-sodium soup
- Whole-grain crackers with natural peanut butter or low-fat cheese
- Whole-grain pita and hummus
- Low-fat yogurt and fruit
- Vegetables and natural peanut butter
- Low-fat cottage cheese and fruit
- Fruit smoothie
- Hot chocolate made with low-fat/fat-free milk
- Popcorn with dried fruit and nuts mixed together

**Don’t Let Snacking Sabotage Your Diet:** It is important to remember a few rules to becoming a smart snacker...

**Rule #1—Portion Control:** Read the label of any packaged snack. Snacks should not be more than 200 calories. Fruit contains about 100 calories per serving and vegetables contain only 25 calories per serving.
Rule #2—Plan for Snacks: If you do not plan snacks into your daily schedule then, more than likely, snacking will not happen or unhealthy choices will be made. An easy way to be a successful snacker is to pack extra food in your lunch. Pull a morning snack out when you arrive at work and save something from your lunch for the afternoon. Another strategy is to keep a stash of healthy snack options at your desk or in the fridge. Keep nuts, canned fruits, cereal, and crackers at your work station. Keep low-fat yogurt, cheese, fruit, and veggies stocked in the fridge.

Rule #3—Balance: Snacks that are just carbohydrate-based will digest quicker and may lead to wanting more before your stomach can signal to the brain that you are satisfied. Choosing snacks that have whole-grain carbohydrates as the base is a wise move. To help with satiety, add a small amount of healthy fat and protein. Snacks that are balanced will curb your appetite for a longer period of time.

Rule #4—Don’t Ignore Your Cravings: If you always crave sweet or salty foods, make sure you choose these types of foods as snack options. Eating a small portion of these types of foods will help curb the craving and prevent overeating. Make healthy choices when choosing sweet or salty snacks. For example, if you are craving chocolate, eat 2-3 Hershey’s kisses or have a cup of hot chocolate made with fat-free milk. If you are craving salty foods, aim for roasted nuts mixed with pretzels and dried fruits, or try a can of vegetable juice with some whole-grain crackers and low-fat cheese. Depriving yourself usually results in overeating when the craving overcomes you.

Rule #5—Location: When eating snacks or meals, it is important to look at where you are consuming your calories. If you are in the car, at a desk, or watching television, you may be distracted and tempted to eat mindlessly. Cue into your hunger and focus on eating and satiety. Paying attention to hunger cues will help prevent overeating.

Snacking can and should be part of a healthy meal plan. Plan for healthy choices to help boost your energy and your metabolism!

1-2-3’s of 100 Calories!

Want to enjoy the pre-portioned convenience of a 100-calorie snack pack without spending a fortune at the grocery store? By pre-packaging your own 100-calorie snacks in reusable containers, you can save money and calories!

1. Take some inventory of what you currently have in your fridge or cupboards. Chances are that you already have some dry cereal, nuts, fruit, string cheese, or single-serving soup packets on hand.

2. Measure out the portion that is equivalent to 100 calories. This will require you to read the Nutrition Facts label and review the serving size and calories per serving. For example, if a serving size of four crackers is 50 calories per serving you know that 8 crackers is about 100 calories. (Note: fresh fruits and vegetables do not have Nutrition Facts labels but they are certainly healthy options for snacks.)

3. Place the portion in a baggie or, better yet, in a reusable plastic container. This way, you will have nutritious and satisfying snacks on hand when you need them most. It’s as easy as 1-2-3!

At next week’s meeting we will discuss what kind of snacks we planned and how we made use of the food we had available.