



The Snacker's SURVIVAL GUIDE

Hunger-busting snack swaps that are good for you

BY STACEY STEIN

You know the feeling. You're curled up on the couch before bed, lost in a good book, when that dull ache that's been building in your stomach becomes a full-blown growl.

Yep, it's a major case of the munchies, and you've got two options: valiantly try to fight those hunger pangs for the benefit of your waistline, or succumb to the snack attack.

According to statistics, most of us are choosing the latter, with snacks now accounting for a whopping 25 per cent of our daily caloric intake, or about 580 calories per day. Researchers say the surge

in snacking – from an average of 1.26 snacks daily in the late 1970s to 2.23 snacks per day from 2003 to 2006 – is very likely to blame for our extra padding. It's not that snacking is bad; rather, the problem lies in the choices we make when we cave in to our cravings. Instead of reaching for a nutrient-dense piece of fruit, too often we're tempted by snacks that are nutritionally bereft, offering nothing but empty calories. And that's not entirely our fault, explains John Fleming, a psychologist in Toronto who specializes in disordered eating. "We're surrounded by highly palatable junk foods, and those things are marketed so well," he says. "We've been sold on the easy life, which is having potato chips or a particular kind of cookie – tasty foods that are readily available."

By making smarter snacking decisions, however, we can still satisfy our cravings and even boost our health. Here's our expert guide to help you through every type of snack attack.

SIZE MATTERS

Overindulging – even on nutritious snacks – can derail any healthy eating plan.

Check out our portion-control primer at canadianliving.com/april.



NEED POP?

Satisfy your thirst with a substitute that's lighter on sugar.

Axe the added sugar but keep the fizz by tossing lemon slices and mint into a glass of soda water. If iced tea is your weakness, make your own: Brew up your favourite blend, add a touch

of honey, and flavour with mint before chilling. "This gives you something refreshing to drink without loads of sugar, and actually provides you with antioxidants," says Vanessa Perrone, a Montreal-based registered dietitian.

Kick empty calories to the curb with your own custom cocktail.

CRAVING A SALTY SNACK?

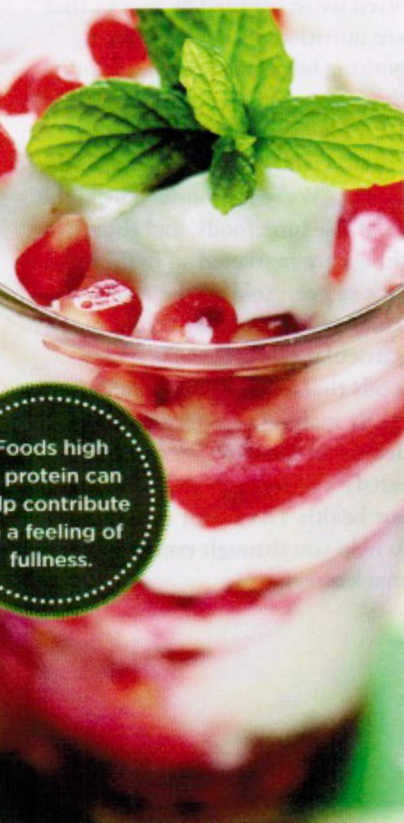
Ditch the potato chips and reach for some salted edamame.

Packaged snack foods are loaded with sodium and often contain little nutritional value. If you absolutely must have something salty, Gloria Tsang, a Vancouver-based dietitian and author of *Go UnDiet* (HealthCastle, 2011), recommends

edamame. The protein-rich green pods are simple to prepare and are naturally low in sodium, so you get to control the amount of salt you consume. The best part is that 300 calories' worth of edamame packs about 29 grams of protein, 10 grams of fibre and important minerals such as iron.



Lowering your sodium intake can reduce your risk for high blood pressure.



Foods high in protein can help contribute to a feeling of fullness.

NEED SOMETHING SWEET?

Steer clear of chocolate cheesecake and make your own Greek-style yogurt parfait instead.

The next time your sweet tooth strikes, consider Perrone's alternative to a calorie-dense confection: a dessert parfait. She layers Greek yogurt between chopped fruit, mixing in some granola, and topping it off


with a sprinkle of shredded coconut. "Each serving of Greek yogurt has twice the protein content of a serving of milk, and is also fat-free," says Perrone, adding that protein helps induce a feeling of fullness.

TOP FIVE SNACKING SINS

1. Mindless snacking. When we shovel food into our mouths while doing something else, such as watching TV or surfing the Internet, the snack doesn't register. "People are much more likely to eat past

fullness [in these instances]," says John Fleming, a Toronto psychologist.

2. Snacking on the go. "When we're eating on the run, we tend to have the feeling that we need to eat fast and we need to finish it," says



The healthy fats found in most nuts can make for a heart-smart snack.

CRAVING CRUNCH?

Swap the caramel corn for a bowl of pistachios, the most waistline-friendly nut.

As long as they aren't coated in chocolate or covered in salt, nuts tend to be a smart snack option. "They're rich in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, which help keep our hearts healthy," says Perrone. The downside is that up to 90 per cent of the calories in some nuts come from fat, which means the calorie count can add up fast. "The key is portion


control," says Perrone. This is one of the reasons she suggests pistachios to satisfy a crunch craving. Not only do they have a slightly lower fat content than most nuts, but the recommended serving of 45 to 50 nuts is also much larger than the 10 to 20 recommended for most other varieties. Consider: A one-ounce serving of pistachios equals a hunger-busting 49 nuts and 159 calories, whereas one ounce of walnut halves only gets you 14 pieces and packs 185 calories.

GOT THE URGE TO DIP?


Nix the nachos and creamy dip, and reach for some crudité's and hummus.

Made from mashed chickpeas, hummus is low in fat and calories. Two tablespoons contain a meagre 70 calories, compared to the 180 found in the same amount of most brands of mayonnaise. Tsang points out that hummus is also high

in fibre and protein, and she recommends making your own from canned chickpeas. Snazz up this snack by getting creative with what you dip. "It doesn't always have to be carrots and celery sticks," says Perrone. "You can reach for endive, radish, fennel bulb and bell pepper."



Slash your calories by more than half by choosing hummus instead of mayo.



It's time to get reacquainted with your old air popper!

WANT POPCORN?

Trade fat-filled buttery microwave popcorn for the air-popped variety.

Air-popped popcorn is a star snack food. "It's low-calorie, which means you can have a high volume," says Perrone. The whole grain kernels are

also filled with fibre, which makes it more satiating than many other snack options. Finding it flavourless without the fat? Create your own signature seasoning with a few shakes of your fave spices.

Vancouver-based dietitian Gloria Tsang, adding that we also tend to make poor snack choices when we're rushed.

3. Lack of advance planning. Pack healthy snacks, such as nuts, dried fruit and cereal bars, before heading

to work, or stash some in your office to avoid making a bad snack choice when that 3 p.m. lull hits.

4. Late-night snacking. "The more tired you are, the more likely you'll eat poorly," says Fleming. Snacking right before bedtime may also

interfere with sleep, which is important for weight regulation.

5. Filling up on snack food. "If you're truly hungry, then you should be having some substantive food so that you're not trying to fill your hunger with potato chips," says Fleming.