



### 6 Ways to Snack during the Pandemic

Chips, cookies, munchies: There is so much snacking going on. It's no shock that many of us reach for cookies, candy, chips and other indulgences during stressful times, whether it's due to the pandemic, the resulting economic downturn or whatever may be going on.

Snack food consumption, including both sweet and savory snacks, increased by 8% during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to consumer research company NPD study. This increase in snacking was so pronounced because this pandemic came upon us so suddenly.

The rise in snack consumption was a result of lockdown boredom and pandemic and election anxiety. Excess snacking translates to excess calories. More calories means more pounds unless snackers compensate by eating less at meals. Reaching for comfort foods is soothing and can be a way to cope with life's uncertainties and challenges. But if you feel your snacking has become an unhealthy habit, here are six strategies to snack better.



**1. Take a pause.** Before you reach for a snack, it's a good idea to stop and think about what will satisfy you. Is it really a handful of chips? Or is it a nap or a bath that you are craving. If you are desiring food, you need to determine what it is you want to eat.

Use a tool like the hunger meter to determine what it is you want to eat. By assigning levels to your hunger for example, "1" being ravenous and "9" being Thanksgiving day stuffed), the meter can help guide you as to what to eat, and can be especially helpful if impulsive or stress-related eating has become problematic. For example, if you are a "4" on the hunger meter (that is, not that hungry, but "snacky"), you might need a piece of fruit with a small handful of nuts. But if you are a "1", you probably need a full meal.

**2. Don't multitask while snacking.** When we are less distracted and more mindful when eating, we are able to appreciate the taste and texture of foods. Chew slowly and savor every bite. This helps make snacking a lot more pleasurable. It also helps avoid mindless nibbling and the excess calories that come with it.

**3. Be an opportunistic snacker.** Look at snacks as opportunities to help fill nutrient gaps in your diet. Healthy snacks like carrot sticks and hummus, fruit and small portions of nuts provide important nutrients, and are great snack choices. Try omega-3 crackers, calcium-rich chocolate smoothie muffins and fiber-rich salted date caramel truffles.

**4. Plan and prep snacks ahead of time.** Shopping and prepping snacks in advance will help to set you up for success in choosing healthier snacks. Keep fruits and veggies washed, cut and at eye level in the fridge, so you can just grab and eat them.



**5. Design a snack friendly kitchen.** Put a bowl of favorite fruits on the kitchen table, so you are more likely to grab them when you crave a snack. Clear counters of cookies, sweets, and soft drinks, put those in the cupboards, out of site. Have fewer options of sweets or salty snacks around. Consumers who have five or more packages of crackers or salty snacks consume those foods at higher rates than consumers with fewer packages in their home.

**6. Make simple swaps.** If you have a sweet tooth, swap candy for dried fruit; premium ice cream for frozen banana "nice" cream and a cinnamon roll for cinnamon raisin toast spread with whipped cream cheese.



#### Applications for Educational Benefits—Free or Reduced Meals

Applications for Free or Reduced Priced School Meals are available and can be filled out any time throughout the school year. Children can get free or reduced price school meals if the total household income is within the limits shown in the letter that is with the Application for Educational Benefits. Children in households receiving MFIP, SNAP, FDIPIR benefits and foster children can get free meals regardless of income. Contact Student Nutrition for more information.