Snacking Your Way to Good Health

It’s a new year, and many people have goals to make this one healthy! Snacks are a big part of a healthy eating plan, and if you choose wisely, snacks can help you reach your health goals.

“Too often, people grab calorie-dense snacks, such as chips or a cookie, because they are hungry between meals,” says Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agent ____________. However, if you plan ahead, you can have a variety of healthy and nutritious snacks ready to grab and go. Choosing healthy snacks from the grains, fruit, vegetables, dairy, and protein food groups can boost your energy between meals and keep your hunger in check so you don’t overeat at meal time. In fact, you can think of snacks as “mini-meals” and view them as opportunities to eat more fruits, vegetables, and calcium-rich dairy foods, which are often under-consumed by Americans.

It’s no secret that many people are trying to lose weight. Therefore, there are a few tips you should follow when choosing to include snacks into your day. First, most people do not need more than one or two snacks per day. You should never snack if you are not hungry, and always avoid the urge to eat if you are bored, stressed, worried, or angry. Next, if you do choose to include snacks in your day, keep snacks to less than 200 calories, and be sure that you do not exceed the total number of calories you need. To help you control snack portions, measure out your foods, or choose foods that are pre-portioned, such as yogurt or canned fruit. Some stores even offer snacks that are pre-packaged in 100-calorie portions.

Many foods make great snacks! Some snacks may just be a single food, such as an apple or popcorn, while others maybe a combination of foods from several food groups, such as fat-free yogurt with fresh berries. Whatever snack you choose, be sure that you choose foods low in solid fat, salt, and added sugar, but high in nutrients and fiber. When planning your snacks, you’ll need to consider whether you need access to a refrigerator to safely store your snack foods. Here are a few ideas for healthy snacks:

- Whole wheat crackers and low fat cheese;
- Fresh vegetables, such as cucumbers and cherry tomatoes, with low-fat salad dressing;
- Fruits canned in their own juice, such as pineapple or pears;
- “Grab and Go” fresh fruits, such as bananas, apples, and peaches;
- Nuts, such as almonds or walnuts;
- Granola bars;
- Low-fat popcorn;
- Peanut butter and celery sticks; and
- Bell peppers and hummus.

Whichever snack you choose, remember to keep it healthy and low in calories!

To learn more about nutrition, contact your local Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service county office at ____________________.