

CHOOSING HEALTHY SNACKS

One of the life-style changes made by Asian Indian immigrants in the US relates to food intake and this has many health implications. Savory and sweet snack foods have always been an indispensable part of the Indian cuisine. There always was chevda, sev and various saltines (namkins) whipped out of the pantry in a quick minute to be served and shared with a cup of tea or coffee even for the unexpected guest.

Snacking however has assumed an even more important role in the Indian immigrant household due to lifestyle constraints like the working homemaker, lack of time for food preparation, (secondary to long commutes to work, multiple tasks, and responsibilities) the absence of social support systems for child care and the ready availability of ready to eat snack foods that may not necessarily be healthy.

Most vegetarian snack items are either made with cereals like rice, rice flour, semolina (sooji), refined wheat flour (maida) or whole wheat flour (atta) and legume flours like chick pea flour (besan), moong flour either in combination or alone. Some snack items may contain nuts, vegetables, spices, salt, oil, ghee and or sugar.

Based on the method of preparation snacks may be:

Savory and salted snacks that are not deep-fried, for example: Uppuma, Pav Bhaji

Savory and salted items that are deep fat fried, for example: Samosa, Pakoras, Bhujias, and Murraku (deep-fried, crunchy spirals).

Savory and salted items that contain a combination of deep-fried and raw ingredients, for example: Bhel puri, Dahi wada, Pani puri and Chaats.

Sweet snacks prepared and preserved in a sugar medium, for example: Rasagolla, Pumpkin petha.

Sweet snacks deep fat fried and preserved in sugar syrup, for example: Jilebi, Gulab Jamun.

Non-vegetarian snacks baked, fried or grilled, for example: Chicken or mutton tikka, Egg pakoras, Fish fry, Shish kababs.

Nutritional Values

Vegetarian snack foods that are based on cereals or legumes are high in carbohydrates. The fat and calorie content is high as well, due to many of the items being either fried or containing oils, ghee or butter. While the salt content of the savory snacks may be high the sweet snacks tend to have even higher amounts of carbohydrate due to the sugar content. When served in combination a savory item with a sweet snack, - the mini meal may have the calories, fats and carbohydrates to be safely considered a meal replacement.

Non vegetarian snack items though considerably lower in carbohydrates and higher in protein are nevertheless calorie rich due to the fats they may contain (often saturated).

Snack Patterns

Traditionally savory snacks are consumed between meals while sweet snacks may be consumed after dinner. A social visit by friends or family prompts the inclusion of snacks with a cup of coffee or tea and may be sweet, savory or both, for not only the guests but the hosts as well. Snacks feature prominently in holiday and special occasion menus.

A predominant number of Indians men and women are in the workforce, hence on weekdays the work force environment may permit the inclusion of a pre-lunch snack at work and a pre-

dinner snack either before leaving the workplace or upon arrival at home. Lack of time for food and snack preparation may influence the inclusion of ready to eat snacks in the diets of this population. Store-made, ready-to-eat snacks while being available on time to appease hunger may offer very little room for manipulation of the actual nutrients and calories ingested. Weekend snacking provides an opportunity to consume more traditional Indian snack items both at home and /or social gatherings. It is customary to serve snacks as appetizers in restaurants and homes.

The challenge of selecting and consuming healthy snacks though daunting is achievable even for the diabetes seeking glycemetic control and weight management.

Tips for choosing healthful snacks:

Daily living:

- Plan your snack menu ahead.
- Take snacks along with you to work.
- Add zing to bland items with free foods.
- Select whole grains when feasible.
- Select baked or steamed snacks rather than fried snacks.
- Include fresh fruit rather than fruit juice for increased fiber.

Dining Out:

- Eat a healthy snack at home before you go out (a slice of low calorie whole wheat toast with coriander chutney*)
- Pick appetizers that are not fried – pick a light soup or fresh lemonade or tomato juice.
- Eat slowly relishing every bite.
- In social situations learn to say – no thanks to second servings.
- If eating in a restaurant – divide your entrée into 2 parts consume one part and take the other home for the next meal.

* Available at most Indian grocers.

Some Healthful Snack Ideas

1. Make your own chevda mix by mixing together 1cup whole wheat Chex, 1cup Puffed rice, 1 cup baked vegetable chips and 1/2cup of dry roasted unsalted peanuts – add your favorite spice powder - shake in a bag and divide into 1/3 cup portions and take it along for a snack at work.
2. Don't like those dry crackers – don't ever want to eat that Melba toast again? Try putting low calorie toppings like a teaspoon of tomato salsa, coriander or mint chutney for a tasty healthy snack. You could even make your own version of chutney/salsa sandwiches with lettuce /tomato and cucumber on whole wheat or multigrain bread for an office snack. If you are being treated for high blood pressure use toppings like salsa, coriander chutney pickles sparingly.
3. Before you stock your pantry with snacks – plan on items you will buy – choose:
Whole grain cereals, crackers and breads. Mint and coriander chutneys along with tomato salsa may be store bought. Include fresh carrots, cucumbers tomatoes and your favorite vegetables to be eaten raw in your snack list. Do not shop on an empty stomach.
4. If you plan on making snacks avoid deep fat frying or adding excessive amounts of oil, butter or ghee. Use low fat replacements when feasible.

5. When making sweet snack consider replacing part of the sugar with sugar substitutes like Equal or Splenda.
6. Use salt and baking soda with caution in all your cookery.
7. Read all product labels to learn what ingredients they contain.
8. For a personalized snack/ food plan contact a Registered Dietitian RD.
9. A snack is not a meal! – keep snack portions small.

How Nutritious is your Favorite Snack?

The table below will help you think about possible healthy snack items in different food groups. Remember portions will still have to be controlled and so should the use of oils, fats, sugar and salt.

Healthy Snack	Not so heart healthy (use less often)
Plain Puffed rice mamra, mudi, Pori. Whole wheat phulka or chappati	Bhel puri Fried maida or wholewheat puri
Roasted corn on the cob Boiled potato chaat or tikkia Baked vegetable chips	Corn pakora Potato vada or fritters,samosa Potato chips
Green gram or chickpea sundal or ghugni or channa masala. Fresh sprouted moong beans. Dhokla	Gram flour batter fried bajjia, vegetable fritters. Dal vada,
Fruit Chaat Fresh fruit	Sweet fruit preserves chutneys. Fruit pies and cake. Chocolate covered fruit.
Grilled tandoori fish, chicken or lamb, kababs or tikka	Fish fry, Chicken nuggets, Meat balls, cutlets and meat croquettes.
Plain lassi	Sweet lassi or mango lassi
Roasted unsalted peanuts	Salted peanuts mixed with fried chevda.

Practical Snack Modifications

Snacks	Modification	Comments
Sev/ mixed chevda bhel and nut mixes	Mix 1 part chevda mix with 3 parts puffed rice or puffed wheat. Add chopped up tomatoes, onion, coriander leaves, cucumber and a dash of lemon juice to puffed wheat /rice instead of chevda or fried mixes.	Reduce fats, carbohydrates and calories Adding vegetables adds fiber and taste.

Samosa/ Kachori/eggrolls	Prepare filling and use as stuffing in whole-wheat chappati, roll serve cut as cocktail wraps. Cherry tomatoes. Steamed cabbage leaves. Bell pepper halves Alternately form the filling into small patties lightly flour and roast on griddle	By not using the pastry shell and not frying you will cut on the calories and fat.
Sooji Uppuma	Prepare uppuma with cracked whole wheat	Adds fiber.
Fish fry and meat patties	Grill / bake or broil. Do not bread or batter	By not frying, the fat and calories are lower. By not breading or batter dipping you reduce the starch and calories.
Pappad	Roast in microwave or grill over open flame. Do not fry. Select less often if on a low salt diet.	By not frying you cut calories.
Sweet desserts Fruit juice/drinks, dried fruits, chocolate coated raisins or strawberries.	Replace with fresh fruit.	Cuts carbohydrates and calories. Adds fiber.
Portion sizes	Small and petite	Reduce calories, fats/ carbohydrates.
Chips / Dips	Replace with fresh vegetables like cucumber, bell peppers, carrots, tomatoes, and broccoli. Alternately use baked vegetable chips. Serve with coriander chutney, mint chutney or tomato salsa	Reduce calories, fats and carbohydrates. By including vegetables you reduce calorie intake and increase fiber.

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