

Snacking on protein can improve appetite control and diet quality in teens

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Some study participants ate a chocolate-peanut-caramel-flavored pudding snack formulated with soy protein. The snack contained 26 grams protein, 6 grams fat and 27 grams carbohydrate. Credit: University of Missouri

Although eating high-protein, afternoon snacks can aid appetite control

in adults, little information exists to guide parents on what types of snacks might benefit their adolescent children. Now, MU researchers have found that afternoon snacking, particularly on high-protein-soy foods, reduces afternoon appetite, delays subsequent eating and reduces unhealthy evening snacking in teenagers.

"Our research showed that eating high-protein [snacks](#) in the afternoon helps teens improve the quality of their diets as well as control appetite," said Heather Leidy, an assistant professor of nutrition and [exercise physiology](#) at MU. "Standard meals tend to go to the wayside for kids this age—particularly from mid-afternoon to late evening—and many of the convenient 'grab-and-go' snacks are high in fat and sugar. When kids eat high-protein snacks in the afternoon, they are less likely to eat [unhealthy snacks](#) later in the day, which is particularly important for kids who want to prevent unhealthy weight gain."

Male and female adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 who were classified as either normal weight or overweight participated in the study, which was led by Leidy in collaboration with colleagues at DuPont Nutrition & Health. The researchers assessed how snacking in the afternoon affected teens' appetite, drive to eat and food choices later in the day and whether these were different when teens skipped eating snacks altogether. The researchers also measured how afternoon snacking affected teens' cognitive performance and mood.

"In addition to the appetite and satiety benefits, we found that when the teens ate the high-protein snacks, they incorporated more protein throughout the day and consumed less dietary fat," Leidy said. "Thus, adding protein snacks in the afternoon could be a good strategy for individuals who are trying to eat more protein throughout the day. In addition, we also found that the high-protein snacks improved certain aspects of mood and cognitive function."

The afternoon protein snacks were soy-protein pudding. Leidy said that although high-protein puddings with soy are not available to the public, similar high-quality protein sources should elicit similar benefits.

"Health professionals increasingly are recommending that people eat more high-protein, plant-based foods like soy, which are high quality and tend to be inexpensive and environmentally friendly," Leidy said. "Our study demonstrated that the positive effects on [appetite](#) and satiety can be extended to consuming soy-protein products."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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