

The science behind why we snack, and how to do it better

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From boredom to corporate marketing, there are a lot of reasons people snack. And not all snacks are the same. Some can boost your diet, while others can leave you feeling bloated and tired. In America, many

snackers are having more of the latter.

According to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, the most common snacks in U.S. households are fruit, cookies, chips, [ice cream](#), candy, popcorn, [soft drinks](#), crackers, cake, milk, nuts and seeds, tea and yogurt. Some of these—like nuts and seeds—can provide an [energy boost](#) in proper portions, while cake is sure to promote unhealthy sugar crashes.

The value of a snack comes down to more than the food itself, though. It's also important to practice good snacking behavior: what you snack on, why you snack, frequency of snacking and how snacks fit into your overall eating plan. Determining each of these for your personal life may take time, but scientists have completed studies to help with the process.

"Research has found various motivations for snacking: hunger, social/food culture, distracted eating, boredom, indulgence, and [food insecurity](#)," the Harvard school reported.

"Along with the ubiquity of snacks in our food environment, marketing may also play a role. The food and beverage industry spends almost \$14 billion per year on advertising in the US, more than 80% of which promotes [fast food](#), [sugary drinks](#), candy, and other unhealthy snacks."

While Americans snack for a multitude of reasons, one thing is clear: They are certainly snacking.

Roughly a quarter of Americans surveyed by the International Food Information Council in 2020 said they snacked multiple times per day. A third more said they snack at least once a day. The most popular snacking motivators were hunger, thirst, desire for a sweet or salty treat, and because [snack foods](#) were readily available.

A total 40% said they occasionally replaced meals— most often lunch—with snacks, and 25% said they sometimes skipped meals entirely. If you are going to snack, you have some healthy options to choose from.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommended people eat nutrient-dense snacks, including raw vegetables, fresh fruit, nuts and plain yogurt.

"Decide which snack choices will satisfy you," the Harvard school reported. "A satisfying snack will alleviate hunger, be enjoyable, and help you to forget about food until your next meal. Think about the last snack you ate—did you still feel hungry or want to keep eating shortly after finishing one portion of the snack? Studies show that snacking on whole foods containing protein, fiber, and whole grains (e.g., nuts, yogurt, popcorn) enhance satisfaction."

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