

the garden issue

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THE TRUTH ABOUT snacks

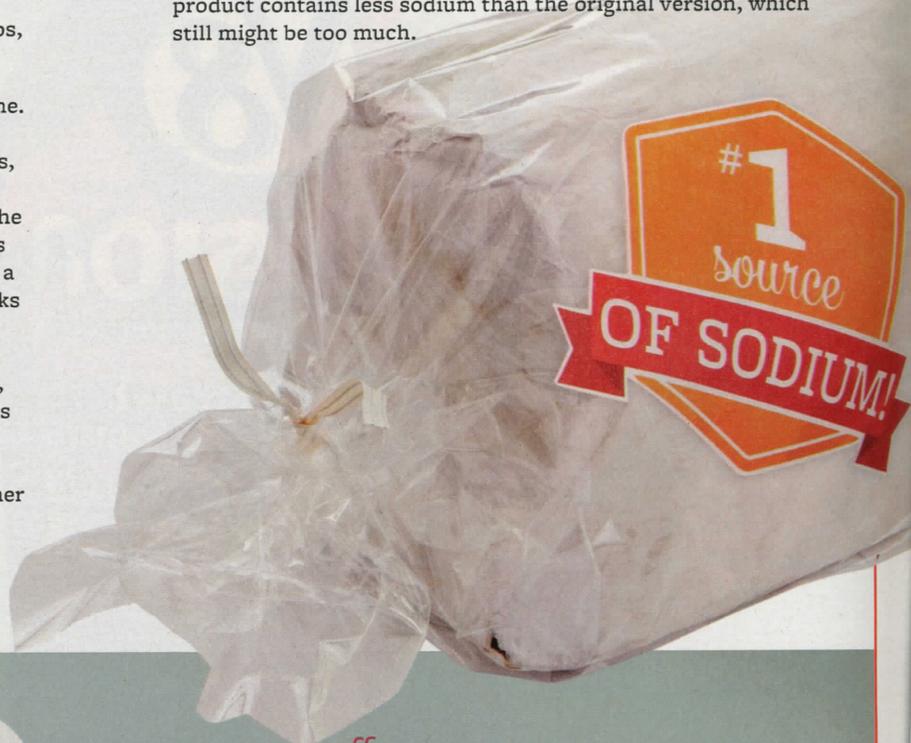
Over the past few decades, nibbling and noshing has become almost constant. One report from the USDA found that people in the United States consume twice as many snacks as we did in 1977. Now nearly a quarter of the calories in our diet—about 504 per day—are eaten between meals, which aren't getting any smaller. "If you make smart choices, snacking can provide a nutritious energy boost and help keep appetite in check," says Judy Caplan, R.D., a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Often, however, we reach for high-cal indulgences such as chips, cookies, and cheese crackers.

Nonstop temptation could be to blame. Processed snacks have crept into 41 percent of all retail establishments, even clothing stores and home improvement centers, according to the *American Journal of Public Health*. As a result, many of us end up grabbing a candy bar whenever we buy new socks or lightbulbs. The better approach, Gerbstadt says: Pack a snack from home that contains 100–200 calories, 10–15 grams of protein, and 2–5 grams of fiber. On the go? Try homemade trail mix or red grapes and string cheese. Visit BHG.com/Snacks for other healthful options.

THE TRUTH ABOUT bread

Surprise: The biggest source of sodium in your diet isn't that bag of potato chips. According to a recent report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it's bread. Together, the two slices in a sandwich can deliver 460 mg, or 20 percent of the USDA's uppermost daily limit. The portion is even higher, more than 30 percent, for people who are African-American, who are 51 or older, or who have high blood pressure, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease.

"A food doesn't have to taste salty to contain high levels of sodium," explains Elena Kuklina, M.D., Ph.D., a CDC researcher and professor of nutrition at Emory University. "Food manufacturers use various forms as a preservative and texturing agent, all of which contributes to overall intake." No wonder 90 percent of Americans consume too much, raising the risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. To scale back, opt for breads and rolls with 120 mg of sodium or less per serving, Kuklina advises. And look twice at packages that make "reduced sodium" claims. That just means the product contains less sodium than the original version, which still might be too much.



THE TRUTH ABOUT coffee

When you think "superfood," you probably picture kale or blueberries. But potent plant goodness comes in liquid form, too. Coffee is the nation's No. 1 source of antioxidants, accounting for 40 percent of our overall intake, according to research from the University of Scranton. "Antioxidants are beneficial because they combat free radicals, molecules that would otherwise increase the risk of disease by harming the body's cells," Gerbstadt says. Indeed, mounting research suggests that a daily 8-oz. cup or two of java—caffeinated or decaf—protects against heart disease and stroke, and is linked to a lower incidence of death in general.

Of course, this sip can't replace a healthy diet, says study author Joe Vinson, Ph.D. Coffee contains only one class of antioxidants, called polyphenols. Load up on nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables to ensure that you're getting the full spectrum.





THE TRUTH ABOUT soft drinks

Sure, you know you shouldn't sip soda nonstop. There's the calories, the sugar—but maybe you didn't realize just how much sugar. A 12-oz. can of cola packs 39 grams, well over the 25-gram limit for an entire day, according to guidelines for women established by the American Heart Association. "Even if you overlook weight gain, excess added sugars may increase blood pressure and systemic inflammation, two risk factors for heart disease," says Rachel K. Johnson, Ph.D., R.D., a nutrition professor at the University of Vermont who helped develop the AHA guidelines.

That's sobering considering the average American consumes 90 grams of added sugars every day, largely through soft drinks. "It's best to think of sweetened beverages as a once-in-a-while treat, like dessert," Johnson says. In lieu of cola, try unsweetened iced tea or seltzer water, and perk it up with a splash of 100 percent fruit juice, a twist of citrus, or muddled mint.

THE TRUTH ABOUT eggs

Just when it seemed eggs were losing their rotten rep, a recent study suggested that eating yolks is as harmful to the arteries as smoking. Not so fast, says Stephen B. Kritchevsky, Ph.D., a professor of internal medicine and translational science at Wake Forest University. Comprehensive research—such as a three-decade review of studies published in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*—has uncovered scant evidence that eating eggs actually raises heart disease risk. "The cholesterol you consume in food has a relatively small effect on the cholesterol in your bloodstream," he says. And that study equating eggs and cigarettes? It didn't factor in the volunteers' exercise habits or other dietary behaviors.

The biggest cholesterol culprits to watch for are saturated fat (abundant in full-fat dairy products) and trans fat (used in some commercially baked foods), Kritchevsky says. A medium-size egg contains only 1 gram of saturated fat, well under the AHA's limit of about 16 grams a day. Plus, eggs are high in protein and hard-to-get nutrients such as lutein and choline. Go on and get cracking!



THE TRUTH ABOUT frozen meals

Black bean-mango pilaf. Wild salmon with asparagus. Coconut-lemongrass chicken with quinoa. Nope, we're not listing restaurant specials; we're talking about the latest offerings in your supermarket freezer case. "Frozen meals have come a long way since those early trays of mystery meat," Caplan says. "Many of the latest microwavable offerings are truly nutritious." Factor in convenience and built-in portion control, and you have an effective slim-down strategy. A study in *Archives of Internal Medicine* found that overweight volunteers who regularly ate frozen prepared meals shed 6 pounds more over a year than people who tried DIY calorie restriction.

Granted, you still have to sort through boxes of gluey mac and cheese to find the frozen gems. "Look for a meal that contains colorful vegetables and whole grains such as brown rice or whole wheat pasta," Gerbstadt says. Then examine the nutrition facts panel to check that the meal has at least 5 grams of fiber and 20 percent of the RDA for vitamins A and C. Each serving should also have no more than 500 mg of sodium and 15 grams of fat. And skip super-low-calorie fare. "Choose meals that contain 400 to 600 calories," Gerbstadt says. "Anything less than that, and you'll be hungry again in an hour."

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The need for portion control goes beyond beef: Major health organizations count pork and lamb as red meat, too.



THE TRUTH ABOUT red meat

Juicy, mouthwatering steak *can* be part of a balanced diet—just don't bite off more than you should chew. "Red meat is an excellent source of protein, iron, and B vitamins," says Lisa Young, Ph.D., R.D., author of *The Portion Teller Plan* (Three Rivers Press). "But some cuts can be high in calories and artery-clogging saturated fat, so it's important to watch your intake." Even if you choose leaner cuts, jumbo portions can leave you too full for veggies and whole grains—and their abundance of disease-fighting nutrients. The average person in the United States eats 34 ounces of red meat per week, far surpassing the 18-ounce limit suggested by the American Institute for Cancer Research.

To better measure your meal, put portions in perspective. "A serving of red meat is 2 to 3 ounces cooked, about the size of a deck of cards or the center of your palm," Young says. Sound skimpy? Make meals more satisfying with well-chosen extras: Top burgers with sautéed onions and mushrooms, fold grated carrots into meat loaf, and pile tacos with pepper slices. And don't let down your guard when dining out. Young analyzed steaks at restaurants and discovered that the average portion was more than twice the recommended size. Slice off a single serving and take the rest home. ■