

5 Healthiest Anti-Aging Snacks Posted Mon, Jun 09, 2008, 2:24 am PDT

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Snacking often gets a bad rap, but if you make intelligent choices about what you eat, you can actually benefit your health and longevity. Read on to find out how!

Why Snacks?

Most of us are used to eating three times a day, but it is much healthier to eat smaller meals more frequently - five small meals a day, for instance. Eating in this way delivers a steady stream of nutrients, blood sugar, and energy to your body throughout the day and is also much less taxing on the digestive and metabolic systems.

And when you eat more small meals throughout the day, you will most likely avoid the pitfalls of overindulging at your next meal and may actually consume fewer total calories for the day.

Keep healthy "grab-and-go" snacks on hand all the time to avoid the tempting lure of high-calorie snacks. Here are my top five snack choices:

1. Nuts and Seeds Keep You Young

Healthy and appetizing, nuts and seeds are absolutely the best snack of the bunch. Helping yourself to a handful of nuts and seeds every day can improve circulation and muscle tone.

And nuts and seeds are especially full of arginine, an amino acid that helps to combat heart disease, impotence, infertility, and high blood pressure, and it also facilitates the healing process. Additionally, arginine can stimulate the pituitary gland at the base of the brain.

The pituitary releases growth hormones, which begin to decline quickly in humans after age 35. This means that after 35, your hormones start to plunge and you experience some aging symptoms. The skin loses elasticity, the muscle loses mass and strength, the lean body tissue decreases, fertility and virility decrease, and other signs of aging start to set in.

Many nuts and seeds are rich sources of vitamin E, lignants and omega-3 fatty acids, which protect you from heart disease and also from the ravages of aging.

Almonds, pine nuts, sesame seeds, Brazil nuts, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, flax

seeds, peanuts, and pistachios: mix them in any combination and enjoy! Keep in mind that there are more nutrients in the raw form than roasted. Make sure that the nuts and seeds are fresh and not old and rancid.

2. An Apple a Day for Heart Health

There are many reasons to eat an apple - or two or three - every day. One study discovered that subjects who ate five apples or more a week had a healthier lung function than those who ate no apples.

And scientists have confirmed that apples also contribute to a healthy heart. Thanks to the fruit's rich pectin content, eating two to three apples per day leads to decreased cholesterol levels. Pectin also helps prevent colon cancer, one of the top causes of death in adults over age sixty.

3. Bring On the Berries

In season again, berries are bursting with antioxidants. The enticing red, purple, and blue skins of berries contain bioflavonoids, antioxidant compounds that reduce free radical damage.

These flavonoids are more potent antioxidants than vitamins C and E, and they also help to reduce inflammation - more effectively even than aspirin!

- Blueberries are your best pick because not only do they have the highest level of antioxidant activity, but they also possess powerful neuroprotective properties that shield brain cells from damage, helping to slow down the age-related onset of memory loss, Alzheimer's, and senility.
- Cherries also contain these beneficial anthocyanin compounds, which stimulate your pancreas to produce insulin. In fact, Chinese researchers have observed that cherries help keep diabetics healthy. These compounds also protect you against cancer, arthritis, and heart disease because they lower cholesterol.

To learn more about the health benefits of berries, [click here](#).

4. Avocado: Packed with Nutrients

Among the many antioxidant nutrients, glutathione is known as the "master antioxidant." This naturally occurring compound, found in avocados (as well as asparagus, walnuts, and fish), is made up of the three amino acids glycine, glutamic acid, and cysteine. Glutathione regulates immune cells, protects against cancer, and assists in detoxifying.

A deficiency in glutathione can play a part in diabetes, liver disease, heart disease, low sperm count, and premature aging. Avocados are also a source of L-cysteine, which helps protect your body from the harmful effects of pollution, chemicals, radiation, alcohol, and smoke. L-cysteine may also help boost immunity, protect you from heart disease, and build muscle. It is also useful for combating inflammation and encouraging healthy hair and nail growth.

Pair your avocado with whole-grain crackers or whole-grain crisp breads for a fiber-rich tasty treat.

5. Apricots for Anti-Aging

One of the staple foods of the famously long-lived centenarians in the Hunza valley of the Himalayas is the apricot. Research has discovered that apricots have the highest levels and widest variety of carotenoids of any food.

Carotenoids are antioxidants that help prevent heart disease, reduce "bad cholesterol" levels, and protect against cancer.

I hope you find the ways to nourish your body with healthy snacks! I invite you to visit often and share your own personal health and longevity tips with me.

May you live long, live strong, and live happy!

-Dr. Mao