

Plant-based Snacks!

“Plant-based nutrition” – What do these words conjure in your mind? Rabbits eating vegetables from your garden? Foods without flavor and pizzazz? Meals without meat?! Raw, uncooked foods? Yes, many people have bad images of a plant-based approach to eating. Most cannot image meals or snacks created by using plants alone. But, as science shows, this approach may be something worth exploring if you want to improve your health! Plant-based dietary habits have been shown to prevent and/or reduce obesity, systemic inflammation, diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease, and associated chronic diseases.^{1,2}

This article is the first of a *seven-part* series on plant-based foods that aims to help you see how easy it can be to replace traditional animal-based meal components and snacks with *plant-based versions* – *and, still enjoy food!* Check out the beautiful pictures to the right – all are plant-based snacks (no animal ingredients included)!

So, here we go – let’s talk about the fun, between-meals food experience – **snacks!** Most of us snack every day. Feeling lethargic in the late afternoon, what do we do? Reach for a cookie, bag of chips, and/or fancy (sugar- and dairy milk-filled) latte. Want to reward ourselves (and/or our children) for something well-done? We run out for a snack (like a dairy-based ice cream cone at the local fast food restaurant).

Snacking has been something that we, as a society, have been doing for years and years! However, the types of snacks have changed significantly in the recent past. In the 1910s, the standard snack was a piece of fruit – yes, it was! Today, snacks we choose usually are highly processed foods created by food scientists who target our innate desires for salt, sugar, and fat!³ And almost every snack we choose has some type of animal-based ingredient.

The good news is that snacking does not have to be a bad thing. Plant-based snacking can be tasty, quick to prepare, and portable for those times when we need a snack while on the go! The key is to plan ahead, read ingredient lists and nutrition labels, and open your mind to new ways of snacking. On the next few pages we share some suggestions for snacks, recipes for snacks, and a plant-based snack challenge. The core focus however is simple: *focus on unprocessed (as much as possible) fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, nuts, and legumes (beans, peas, etc.)!*

¹<https://nutritionstudies.org/china-study-references/>

²<http://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002039>

³For further reading on food formulation, check out Michael Moss’s award-winning book, [Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us](#).





Ideas for Plant-based Snacking!

Ok, so you decided to try plant-based snacking. This may require you to think differently about snacking – instead of grabbing cookies, donuts, ice cream, potato chips, dairy-based coffees, yogurt, or other items that include animal-based ingredients, try some of the snacks presented below that will enhance your health, mood, and energy levels!

Ants on a Log: Using almond butter (has more calcium than peanut butter), spread in hollow part of celery, and place dried cherries on top! Traditional recipe of peanut butter and raisins works as well. Place in a container for travel.

Bean salsa with crispy whole grain pita chips*: High in fiber, protein, lysine (an amino acid our bodies need) due to the beans, and high in antioxidant vitamins (A and C) due to the colorful veggies. Try this colorful, tasty, healthy snack!

Bowl of healthy cereal with non-dairy milk: Remember, *read the label and ingredient list* to select cereal without animal products, with B12 added, low sugar, and high fiber (unfrosted mini wheats, Ezekiel 4.9, granola [low-sugar versions], regular Cheerios); use soy or almond milk to finish the bowl! Add a teaspoon of ground flax or chia seed for added omega-3 fatty acids our bodies need!

Dairy-free latte/coffee: Keep unsweetened coconut creamer, almond or soy milk, on hand to mix into your coffee. Buy versions with the least amount of sugar. If ordering coffee out, ask for non-dairy milk – most shops have them!

Fresh fruit and/or veggies: Simple, easy, quick – keep them in your fridge and/or on the counter for grab-and-go!

Frozen grapes: Little popsicles! Put a handful in a bowl in the freezer and snack on these all day long!

Fruit ice cream: Keep frozen fruit in freezer, blend in blender for instant “ice cream!” (mango, berries, bananas, etc.)

Fruit smoothie*: Using frozen fruits, or fresh fruit with ice cubes, blend with non-dairy milk (soy, almond, cashew, etc.). If buying a smoothie on the run, make sure they do not put dairy milk in it, ask for plant-based soy or almond!

Green smoothie*: Using nutrition powerhouses, blend kale (or spinach), lemon juice, orange and/or apple and banana for a great snack! Add a tablespoon of ground flax or chia seed for added omega-3 fatty acids our bodies need!

Humus and veggies, or crackers made without animal ingredients (read the label!): Like the beans in the salsa described above, garbanzo beans used to make humus are high in fiber, protein, lysine (an amino acid our bodies need), and veggies have lots of vitamins and minerals. This is super portable: baggie of veggies + container of humus!

Nuts: Mix it up with nuts, portable and high in nutrition – walnuts, almonds, pecans, peanuts. *BUT*, be careful to only eat about 12 at a time as they are super high in calories! 12 may not seem like a lot, but it is enough to satiate you!

3 whole grain crackers with nut butter: Look for whole grain crackers with fewest ingredients (Triscuit Thin Crips, ½ of Wasa, etc.) and layer a bit of almond or peanut butter on top. Eat just a few due to nut butters having lots of calories!

Homemade trail mix: Combine 2 cups whole-grain cereal (see above for how to select), ½ cup raw old-fashion oats (not instant!), ½ cup chopped dates (or other dried fruit), ¼ cup raisins, ¼ cup chopped walnuts, ¼ cup chopped almonds.

*See recipe on next page

⁴This recipe and more awesome plant-based snacking ideas are found at:
<https://www.forksoverknives.com/plant-strong-snacking-rip/#gs.CSo5D44>

Bean salsa with crispy whole grain pita chips⁵

- 1 (15 ounce) can yellow corn, drained
- 1 (15 ounce) can white corn, drained
- 2 (15 ounce) cans black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 (14.5 ounce) can Italian-style diced tomatoes, drained
- 1 bunch finely chopped cilantro (or 2 Tbsp dried cilantro)
- 5 green onions, finely chopped
- 1 small red onion, finely chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic (look for prepared garlic in grocery section for quick prep)
- 1/4 cup lime juice (Juice of one lime)
- 1 avocado - peeled, pitted, and diced (optional)
- Salt (with iodine added, which our bodies need) and pepper
- Whole grain pita, cut into 8 pieces

Stir together all ingredients (gently if including avocado). Salt and pepper to taste. Toast pita pieces. Enjoy!

Fruit smoothie⁶

- 1 cup frozen berries, bananas, and/or other fruit
- 1 cup non-dairy milk (almond, soy, cashew, etc.)
- 1 Tbsp ground flax seed or chia seed (optional, but try to include it for the rich omega-3 boost!)

OR

- 1 cup fresh berries, bananas, and/or other fruit
- 1 cup non-dairy milk (almond, soy, cashew, etc.)
- ½ cup ice cubes
- 1 Tbsp ground flax seed or chia seed (optional, but try to include it for the rich omega-3 boost!)

Blenders are our best friends when we include plant-based snacks and meals in our dietary plans. Yes, some are very expensive, but some affordable “bullet” blenders can do the job of blending the nutritious vegetables and fruits included in these recipes. Look for affordable “bullet” blender brands such as Oster, Hamilton Beach, KitchenSmith, and Bella for some that are *less than \$20!*

Blend together all ingredients in blender till smooth. Add more non-dairy milk and/or ice cubes if desired.

Green smoothie⁶

- 1 cup kale or spinach (nutrition powerhouses!)
- 2 Tbsp prepared lemon juice (1/2 lemon) (helps nutrients release from the greens above)
- 1 apple, cored and sliced (or 1 orange, peeled and seeded, for a very different, yummy flavor!)
- 1 Tbsp ground flax seed or chia seed (optional, but try to include it for the rich omega-3 boost!)
- ½ of a banana (optional, but adds good nutrition!)
- ½ cup water (or coconut water for a bit of sweetness, but it does add sugar!)
- ½ cup ice cubes (or more if you want smoothie colder)

Blend together all ingredients in blender till smooth. Add more water as desired to make smoothie more like a juice.

⁵Adapted from: <https://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/143315/heathers-cilantro-black-bean-and-corn-salsa/>

⁶From Dr. Danielle Hollar’s recipe files.

The 2-Week Plant-based Snacking Challenge!



Now that you've read about how easy, and delicious, plant-based snacks can be, we would like to challenge you, and your family and friends, to a **2-week Plant-based Snacking Challenge!** Copy this page for everyone in your Challenge, encourage them to compete the table, and share results with each other via text, Instagram, Facebook (snap a picture), or the old way, in person! We hope you will see just how yummy plant-based snacks can be, and perhaps you'll continue with them after the Challenge ends! WRITE CHALLENGE START DATE HERE: _____

Share your experiences using #CommittoHealth and by tagging NRPA!

@National Recreation and Park Association (Facebook), @NRPA_news (Twitter) and @nrpa (Instagram)

Challenge Day	Day of the week (Write it in)	Describe plant-based snack(s) you enjoyed	Comments about the experience (how you/others enjoyed it, what recipe you used, who you shared snack with, etc.)
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			
Day 8			
Day 9			
Day 10			
Day 11			
Day 12			
Day 13			
Day 14			