Snacking from a Dietitian Perspective

I have been working in the hospital setting as a clinical dietitian alongside healthcare professionals for ten years. During this time I have listened to many staff share their struggles with eating in a busy, demanding and high stress environment. Listening to a wide variety of complaints from not enough time to eat to I eat everything insight related to stress. I have sadly watched many staff turn to fad diets, caffeine, and supplements as the answer to all their nutrition related problems.

As a dietitian, I do not have a quick fix to the nutrition struggles of staff but, I can make suggestions. One being healthy snacks. Having a “go to” selection of healthy snacks can prevent trips to vending machines, restaurant delivery, or consuming everything you can fit on a tray from the cafeteria when you finally get a lunch break.

Preparation is key to healthy snacking. As part of your routine prior to starting your work week preparing/planning your healthy snacks should be added to this list.

Eight Power Packed Snacks:

1. Edamame – contains slowly digestible fiber to keep hunger at bay packing in up to 16 grams of protein and less than 200 calories per cup.
2. Greek Yogurt with Almonds – compared to traditional yogurt, Greek yogurt tends to contain more calories and more protein, providing more energy for a 12-hour shift. On average, a 6-oz. serving of fat-free, plain Greek yogurt contains 100 calories and 18 grams of protein compared to a 6-oz. fat free plain traditional yogurt containing 80 calories and 8 grams of protein. Almonds add an extra kick of protein and fiber which are known to increase satiety- keeping you fuller longer. Almonds are also packed with healthy fats, antioxidants, magnesium and vitamin E.
3. Hummus and fresh vegetables – this is a quick and easy snack packed with fiber and protein with the addition of fresh veggies packing in essential vitamins.
4. Dark Chocolate (containing 70-99% cocoa solids) and fresh fruit – studies have been able to show that dark chocolate can improve insulin sensitivity, reduce blood pressure in healthy individuals, protect against heart disease and improve HDL cholesterol. Portion control is key when consuming this decadent treat. Recommended serving 10grams (1 piece) of 100 gram chocolate bar.
5. Get creative with Overnight Oats – Packed with protein and fiber to keep you fuller longer.

Quick Overnight Oats Recipe (Serves 1)

Ingredients:

½ cup old-fashioned oats

½ cup milk (low-fat) or almond or coconut milk

½ teaspoon pure maple syrup

¼ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Optimal toppings: fresh fruit, sliced or silvered almonds, other nuts, etc.

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients in a mason jar. Seal with a lid and shake to mix.
2. Refrigerate at least 6 hours and up to 3 days. Serve with toppings as desired.
3. Mozzarella Cheese Stick paired with fresh fruit – Cheese stick packs protein and calcium and can be grabbed quickly before charting and eaten quickly prior to dashing off to next task.
4. Popcorn – is a whole grain meaning it can be a good source of dietary fiber. Plus, it can be found sugar free, fat free, and low in calories. Just ~31 calories for one cup of air popped popcorn.
5. Trail Mix – let your creativity run wild. Don’t forget serving sizes are important so a ¼ cup snack is my recommendation. Try Simply & Savory Mix: 1 cup unsalted almonds, 1 cup unsalted walnuts, 1 cup salted sunflower seeds, 1 cup dried unsweetened cranberries.

Do you struggle with portion sizes? Buy individual refillable reusable containers you can fill each week to keep your portion sizes in check or purchase one larger reusable container you can fill with all your snacks that becomes your snack box.

Remember snacking can help keep hunger at bay so you don’t end up ravenous and overeat when you finally do get a break for a meal but, it should not replace three balanced meals per day. Also, just as we encourage patients to eat breakfast make sure you eat a protein-fiber packed nutritious meal before your shift.