



Top 3 Evening Snacking Mistakes

By Andrea Holwegner BSc, RD

Regardless if you are watching the playoffs, student studying for exams or coming home stressed out after a long workday, snacking in the evening is part of life.

Since we eat for many reasons including physical hunger, celebration, social connection and family tradition. We also eat in response to habit and emotional triggers such as stress, sadness and boredom. The good news is that you don't need to eliminate enjoyable foods and avoid snacking in the evening; it is about finding a balance between health and enjoyment.

Top 3 Evening Snacking Mistakes

Here are the top 3 snacking mistakes to consider that could help you manage your health but still save room for fun and enjoyment:

1. Starve now and binge later mindset

Intentionally under-eating during the day to save up for a fun evening later just further provides you with permission to over-do-it both physically and emotionally. Often if you are struggling with overeating in the evening you may be trying to rely on willpower to change this habit. The first thing to consider is what you are eating for breakfast as well as your intake throughout the day. Everything is connected. Eating 3 balanced meals and potentially some snacks so that you are fueled with something every 3-5 hours is a good rule of thumb. Coming home underfed after a long workday or stressful study schedule makes it very difficult to manage evening snacking since your body is attempting to make up for the food it didn't get. Toss in emotional triggers such as stress, fatigue and boredom and you may be eating far more than you intend.

2. Failing to manage the environment

Food psychology research has found that the more we have the more we eat. If you stock your pantry with a large variety of junk food you can bet you will eat lots of this. If you stock your pantry and fridge with a tremendous variety of attractive healthy foods you will eat more of this. The key is managing our environment such as our home, car, desk at work and more to make sure we have the right type of fuel available when you are hungry.

We eat packages not portions. Be sure to place hard to manage junk foods in small portions and buy small units rather than shopping in bulk. The trick is not to eliminate them but have an awareness of how you work best. As the chocoholic nutritionist stashing a large selection of chocolate bars in my pantry would not be a good idea since I would eat it far more often and in a larger amount than truly needed. Instead if I truly want chocolate I go out and buy a chocolate bar. This has eliminated the "nice to have" cravings and allowed the "need to have" cravings to be met.

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3. Using food to stuff and starve uncomfortable emotion

Food can be used to numb and stuff down uncomfortable emotions. The evenings can be especially challenging when trying to manage emotional eating since it is a time you may be unwinding, tired and thinking about the challenges of the day. Emotional eating experts and creators of Craving Change TM, Dr. Colleen Cannon (clinical psychologist) and Wendy Shah (registered dietitian) have built an entire business solely focused on why we eat the way we do and what to do about it if we are eating in a way that is uncomfortable.

Everyone eats for emotional reasons sometimes. It is perfectly normal to eat when you are sad, mad, happy or stressed. However, if your eating is bringing you down and making you feel uncomfortable regularly, there is hope if you are willing to ask yourself some tough questions.

Here are the three most important questions you need to contemplate:

1. What is eating me? What am I “stuffing”? If I am eating when I am not truly hungry, is it because I am stressed, sad, bored, angry, worried, etc.?

2. What am I hungry for? What am I looking for in my life that has not come my way yet? What fulfills me and brings me joy?

3. How can I comfort myself without food? How else can I soothe or nurture myself? Is there an enjoyable hobby, task or activity that I could do instead of turning to food?

If you are brave enough to really explore these questions and do the work to solve them, I guarantee your relationship with your body and weight will improve.

Top Snack Attacks

Here is a list of ideas that are popular with both kids and adults:

1. Whole-wheat pita bread and hummus with celery sticks.
2. Multigrain crackers with cream cheese topped with cucumbers or red peppers.
3. Smoothie made with yogurt, frozen berries, banana and unsweetened juice or milk.

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4. Dry ready-to-eat breakfast cereal mixed with dried fruit (such as raisins, dried cranberries, dates, figs, prunes and dried apricots) as well as mixed shelled nuts or seeds (such as peanuts, almonds, cashews, pumpkin seeds or sunflower seeds). Other popular additions include pretzels, popcorn, crackers and chocolate chips.
5. Chocolate milk and a banana (or toss these in the blender with ice for a smoothie).
6. Taco chips with bean dip (layer canned refried beans, avocado, salsa and top with grated cheddar cheese).
7. Oatmeal date squares and a glass of milk.
8. Raw veggies such as grape/cherry tomatoes, carrots, celery, broccoli, cauliflower, snow/snap peas with creamy dip.
9. Mug of hot chocolate made with milk and oatmeal cookies.
10. Apple or rhubarb crisp with frozen yogurt.
11. Rice Krispie squares made with part bran cereal and raisins.
12. Bran muffin and cheddar cheese with grapes.
13. Greek salad.
14. Yogurt parfait with yogurt, berries (or alternatively try fresh or canned unsweetened pineapple or peaches) and granola.
15. Whole wheat crackers with cheddar or other cheese.
16. Mini bocconcini (fresh mozzarella cheese) and grape/cherry tomatoes on toothpicks.
17. Taco chips with salsa
18. Spread peanut butter or other nut butter on a banana and roll in crushed breakfast cereal.
19. Fresh fruit kabob with yogurt dip.
20. Oatmeal or ready-to-eat breakfast cereal and milk.
21. Grated carrots and raisins with sweet vinaigrette.
22. Homemade chips (cut up whole wheat pita or tortillas into triangles with scissors, spray or brush with oil and top with a sprinkle of salt and bake until crispy).
23. Unsweetened applesauce cup and whole wheat crackers with tzatziki dip.
24. Frozen grapes and cubes of cheese.





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25. Cold leftover pancakes or French toast with jam.
26. Cottage cheese with sliced apples or pears with a sprinkle of cinnamon.
27. Hardboiled egg and whole wheat crackers.
28. Freeze leftover smoothies into popsicle cups for healthy homemade frozen popsicles.
29. Yogurt tubes frozen and frozen grapes.
30. Dessert flavored tofu with sliced strawberries or other berries.
31. Warm vanilla milk (mug of milk with vanilla and a pinch of brown sugar) and chocolate chip oatmeal cookies.
32. Banana bread, banana muffins or carrot muffins served with yogurt.
33. Mini pizzas made with mini whole wheat bagels or pita bread and tomato sauce, meat, veggies and cheese.
34. Homemade air-popped popcorn with butter or non-hydrogenated margarine.
35. Mix almond butter or peanut butter with water to make a runny dip for pretzels, celery sticks, banana or apple slices.

Andrea Holwegner, known as the Chocoholic Dietitian, is founder and president of Health Stand Nutrition Consulting Inc., a member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and a media expert for the Dietitians of Canada. For nutrition counselling information and to sign up for a free monthly newsletter loaded with nutrition tips, recipes and more visit www.healthstandnutrition.com. Twitter @chocoholicRD.

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