

Nutrition

Eight New Waistline-Friendly Snacks

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Hours have passed since your lunch meeting, and it'll be several more until you can sit down for dinner. It's 4 p.m. and, no surprise, you're hungry for your "fourth meal" of the day--your daily snack.

If you're hoping to curb your hunger without losing control of your waistline, you're in luck. That's because the snack food industry is continuing to increase its focus on producing healthy, or at least healthier, products. That means more low-calorie snack packages are hitting supermarket shelves, along with labels touting organic and all-natural contents.

"Consumers, overall, are more concerned with the kinds of foods they're eating," says Susan Fussell, spokeswoman for the National Confectioners Association. "They're asking, 'Where did it come from, how did it get to me and what's the nutritional profile?'"

Snack Breakdown It's estimated that 19% of all meals eaten in America are snacks, falling somewhere in between breakfast and lunch or lunch and dinner. In 2007, 51% of all Americans regularly ate food in between meals that was somehow labeled as "better for them," compared to 44% in 2004, according to Harry Balzer, vice president at Port Washington, N.Y.-based market research firm NPD Group.

Of those snacks, products marketed as sugar-free, trans-fat free and full of whole grains are making the biggest gains in terms of consumption. The 100-calorie snack pack, which may only indicate that a snack is healthy portion-wise, is still a popular phenomenon. And Americans continue to love convenient snack bars and yogurt, which has what Balzer calls "a halo of health."

What's New? Among the healthy new bars on the market right now is thinkproducts' think5 bar, which packs five cups of vegetables and fruits--meeting the U.S. Department of Agriculture's entire recommended daily



allowance. Since a snack full of dried spinach, watercress, broccoli, carrots and beets may not sound that appetizing, the bars have a berry flavor and also come covered in chocolate.

"A lot of people, when they get into nutrition, need a transition product," says thinkproducts' CEO Lizanne Falsetto. "This is something that can help lead them down the path."

Crum Creek Mills' healthy new take on biscotti, called Biscuties, are made with almonds, raisins and soy protein; four cookies contain 4.5 grams of fat, two grams of fiber and five grams of protein.

While just a small portion of the snack market, meat products are also expected to grow in sales this year, according to a March report by San Jose-based market research firm Global Industry Analysts. That could be because health-conscious consumers are still leery of carbohydrates or they're looking for a snack that feels like a meal. Either way, meat snacks are breaking down the old gas-station food stereotype.

Meat snack manufacturer Jack Link's, for example, is branching out and offering new 50-calorie portion-control snack packs in varieties such as prime rib tender cuts, strips of beef that are marinated and slow cooked before being smoked and dried. One .6-oz. package contains no trans fats and six grams of protein.

And if you're looking for organic snacks, Hillside Candy has obtained the USDA organic seal for its GoNaturally Hard Candies, now available in pomegranate. Another choice is Sensible Foods' year-old line of four organic dried fruit and vegetable snacks, including the 100% Organic Sweet Corn. A .75-ounce bag, the equivalent of a half-cup of fresh corn, contains just corn and sea salt, along with one gram of fat and 70 calories.

Though only a quarter of Americans eat organic food on a regular basis, according to NPD Group, snack manufacturers are tapping into the demand and gaining loyal customers as a result.

"Snacks never used to be considered a health item," says David Baxes, CEO of Sensible Foods. "They were something to fill you up in between meals. But now people want to extend their interest in eating properly past meal times."



think5 Bar

\$2.99 for a 72-gram (2.53-oz.) bar

It's hard to go wrong with a snack that serves up five cups of fruits and vegetables--meeting the U.S. Department of Agriculture's recommended daily allowance. Thinkproducts' think5 bar contains spinach, watercress and a blend of broccoli, carrots and other veggies, but pops with the taste of cranberry. Try it in red berry or chocolate red berry.

For more information, visit www.thinkproducts.com.