

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly: Being Selective in the Fuel Choices We Make

By Cindy Matthews

Easy as pie. Piece of cake. Happy as a clam. Visit the Golden Arches. Leggo my Eggo!

Our society is bombarded with food messages and this creates challenges for us to effectively fuel our bodies and minds.

Food basics 101:

Food provides energy in the form of calories. Energy facilitates active brains and helps our bodies grow. As you may already know, the teen years are a time of rapid growth during which weight gain is normal. Healthy bodies come in a variety of different sizes, so it is really important that we focus on healthy eating habits and physical activity and not on weight gain.

Kinesiologist Melissa Botz, BSc, says it's important to keep a low glycemic index. She says, "Choose foods that will not spike your insulin and then drop off dramatically, causing highs in energy followed by lows. Try eating an apple with a piece of low fat cheese". Also, avoid drinking your calories by substituting water instead.

The Glycemic Index (GI):

The Glycemic Index is the measurement scale that ranks the effects of carbohydrates (carbs) on blood glucose (sugar) levels. Carbs that break down quickly during digestion and release glucose into the blood have a high glycemic index. Carbs that break down slowly and release glucose more gradually into the blood, have a low glycemic index. Health care professionals encourage us to eat foods with a low glycemic

index, for example, 100% whole wheat bread; Oat Bran cereal; grains such as rice, pasta, noodles; sweet potato, chickpeas, and lentils.

How to make sense of it all?

According to food nutritionist Veronica Streeter, BScFN, the Canada Food Guide (www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide) is an excellent resource for healthy eating. Streeter says that at least 3 of 4 food groups need to be present per meal at the rate of three meals a day and one or two snacks daily.

- sprinkled on top
- whole-wheat tortilla plus a tablespoon of peanut butter
- smoothie: blend yoghurt with a favourite fruit and a splash of juice
- walnuts or a piece of avocado for healthy skin
- drink lots of water (2 litres a day)

Schaffenburg says many teens enjoy an evening snack. A suggested treat is popcorn (try low-fat, low-salt or homemade). If your family does choose to get chips and pop for an occasional movie night, then "just get

Females	Ages 9-13 years	Ages 14-18 years
Food Groups	# of Servings	# of Servings
Fruits and Vegetables	6	7
Grains	6	6
Milk and Alternatives	3-4	3-4
Meat and Alternatives	1-2	2

Adapted from <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/basics-base/quantit-eng.php>

Dr. Jocelyn Schaffenburg, a Waterloo family physician, agrees. Snacking is quite all right if the choices, frequency and serving sizes are appropriate. "Snacks are fine, as long as one realizes at the next meal that you probably do not need as big a portion".

Snack options can include:

- whole wheat crackers with peanut butter, hummus or thinly sliced cheese
- cut up vegetables plus low-fat dip
- homemade trail mix with whole grain cereals, dried fruit and seeds
- low fat yoghurt (1/2 cup) with berries and whole grain cereal

enough so that everyone can have a small portion, not so much that it is in the home at all times". Otherwise, if the low nutrition, high calorie food is readily available in your kitchen, then "people's resistance often goes down in the evening, and they snack on these items and binge". Streeter suggests that you try to monitor when you eat more out of habit than hunger.

Societal pressures:

Society has manipulated the environment around food marketing. When you visit the supermarket, the centre aisles are jammed with low spoilage, high fat



The Good

What to do:

- Healthy snacking is okay
- Use Canada's Food Guide – use 2-3 food groups and 2 + colours per snack
- Eat food to fuel the brain and mind
- Be prepared. Pack easy, nutritious snacks
- Build exercise into daily routines
- Drink water
- Eat nutritiously to increase focus
- Notice your hunger
- Eat healthy for healthier skin

The Bad

Avoid:

- Impulse buying
- Storing junk food in bulk
- Supermarket aisles with pre-packaged, low nutrient foods
- Believing that there are miracle foods
- Eating over-processed, low nutrition / empty calorie foods
- Eating as a habit, when emotional, or bored

The Ugly

Pay attention to:

- Binge eating
- Purging, vomiting
- Seeking and eating 'miracle' cures (e.g. only eating soup)
- Skipping meals to lose weight
- Never exercising
- The need to seek help

foods and poor nutritional value items. Streeter and Botz suggest instead that you get organized by packing healthy snacks BEFORE leaving for school. This will help avoid making an impulse buy of unhealthy choices later in the day.

More than eating counts:

Both Streeter and Schaffenburg note that exercise has a role to play in our daily lives. Schaffenburg recommends exercising a minimum one hour a day and walking to and from school counts! Drinking water, eating foods high in fiber and watching portion sizes are all key.

I want to be a vegetarian:

It is possible to eat well and practice vegetarianism. Using Canada's Food Guide will assist you in this

practice. If a food group is skipped (e.g. meat and alternatives), then you will need to find alternate foods to provide vitamins and minerals.

Eat and eat and eat:

Binge eating and skipping meals are to be avoided. Binge eating means that you over eat and then you may choose to vomit to rid the body of food. This is an eating disorder that can cause serious consequences

and you should seek medical assistance and advice from a doctor or nutrition expert to help you. Botz recommends that you monitor being overly-concerned with body image. The National Eating Disorder Centre website www.nedic.ca is a terrific resource if you want to read more on this topic.

So... Snacking is okay. Watch your portions and food content. Pass the popcorn, hold the salt.

Author Biography:

Cindy Matthews is a freelance writer living in Southwestern Ontario. She works for the Waterloo Region District School Board as a vice-principal of specialized programs. She and husband John are parents of three young adult children, all of whom usually practice healthy snacking choices.

Resources used: Three interviews: **Jocelyn Schaffenburg**, Family Physician, Waterloo, ON **Veronica Streeter**, Food Nutritionist (currently completing her Masters) **Melissa Botz**, BSc, Kinesiology, Two websites: www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide, www.nedic.ca