

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“So-Called ‘Healthy Snacks’ Require Caution”

Some snacks may appear “healthy,” but they actually may not be. Even though ingredients and calories are listed on nutrition labels, many people don't take the time to look. In fact, nearly 50% of US adults reported that they “sometimes,” “rarely,” or “never” read nutrition labels. **Yogurt:** Flavored yogurt can contain 15-plus grams of sugar per serving and thus, a higher caloric profile. These extra calories make flavored yogurt—despite its pleasant taste—a bad snack choice. **Trail Mix:** Many brands of trail mix include less-than-healthy ingredients, such as M&Ms or chocolate chips. Furthermore, many types of trail mix use salted nuts rather than unsalted nuts, which can raise your blood pressure level. **Rice Cakes:** Flavored rice cakes, however, are dusted with salt and sugar. If you have to choose between plain rice cakes and flavored ones, go plain. But people with diabetes beware: Rice cakes of any sort can spike blood sugar levels because they are made of highly refined carbohydrates. **Pretzels:** Pretzels are usually made from refined carbohydrates with little nutritional value. As a snack, pretzels won't sustain you. Instead, they'll give you a quick sugar high. **Fruit cocktail in syrup:** Fruit cocktail consisting of bits of pears, grapes, cherries, peaches, and pineapples coated in heavy syrup makes for a bad snack. The syrup adds 10 grams of sugar per serving, which translates to an additional 40 calories. Instead, opt for fruit cocktail in 100% natural juice or—even better—fresh fruit salad. **Deli meats:** Deli meats are loaded with nitrates, sodium, additives, and preservatives. These things have been linked to heart disease and cancer. A much healthier alternative could involve preparing chicken or turkey breast. **Sprouts:** *Escherichia coli*, *Listeria*, and *Salmonella* thrive in the same warm, moist conditions where sprouts grow. In recent years, there have been numerous recalls due to bacterial contamination of bean, pea, and alfalfa sprouts. **Veggie straws:** Although “veggie” is in the name, veggie straws are a terrible snack. These airy, crunchy, straw-shaped crisps contain no protein or fiber, lack nutrients, and are only slightly better than potato chips because they contain a little less fat. For a healthier, authentic veggie alternative, try munching on celery sticks or baby carrots with a tasty dipping sauce. **Granola:** Like trail mix, granola is associated with the purity of nature. But granola can make for a sinister snack if you're not careful. Typically, granola is sweetened with sugar, which adds extra calories. Additionally, it's easy to go overboard with granola and consume way too many portions.

In the America that I love, get a healthy balance of nutrients and calories. Read food labels carefully because companies may try to hide the true composition of their product.

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