

5 So-Called ‘Healthy’ Snacks That Aren’t

Yogurt makers tout the immune system-boosting punch of probiotics. Protein bars are pitched as nutritious alternatives to candy bars. And granola, trail mix, and fruit smoothies have become synonymous with healthy snacking.

But are these so-called “healthy” snacks all they’re cracked up to be? The answer, health experts say, depends on many factors and varies product-to-product.

A new *Consumer Reports* analysis found, for instance, that while some protein snack bars are a good nutritional bet, others have as many calories as a Snickers bar. Greek yogurt is a protein-rich source of probiotics, but some fruit-on-the-bottom varieties contain more sugar than a cup of ice cream. And certain fruit smoothies and brands of granola and trail mix have the same nutritional profile as a can of soda or a couple of donuts.

The take-home message: Big differences in nutrition, calories, sugar, and fat make it essential for consumers to read labels of any snack foods or beverages they buy.

“Snack bars might seem like a healthy choice for those munchie moments, with images of wholesome berries and nuts on the wrapper and claims such as ‘superfoods in every bite,’ ” *Consumer Reports’* experts noted in the magazine’s recent analysis of protein bars. “But the truth is that not all bars are a healthy snack—some have about the same calories, fat, and sugar in every bite as a candy bar.”

Robert Newman, a certified nutritionist and wellness expert from East Northport, N.Y., notes that healthy snacks do exist in the form of packaged bars, servings, and drinks. But fresh fruit, nuts, Greek yogurt, and other whole, unprocessed foods

are equally convenient, portable, and satisfying—and don't contain "processed junk, usually too high in carbohydrates," he tells *Newsmax Health*.

"The whole food approach is always the best approach," he adds. "I prefer organic walnuts, almonds, cashews, and pumpkin seeds. To be decadent I add dark chocolate flakes or chips. A handful of the above will satisfy most appetites and provide healthy fats, carbohydrates and a small amount of protein."

That said, if you do opt to choose snack foods, here are some ways to be sure you're getting the best nutritional bang for your buck.

1. Yogurt: Plain Greek-style yogurt is packed with more protein than traditional yogurt and lower in sugar and carbs than flavored varieties. But be aware that some fruit-on-the-bottom yogurts are surprisingly high in calories, carbs, and sugar. A typical six-ounce fruit-at-the-bottom yogurt serving can pack nearly 30 grams of carbs and nearly as many grams of sugar—the same amount in a candy bar.

Tip: Buy plain Greek yogurt, be sure to mix in the liquid that tends to float on top (that's beneficial whey) and add your own fresh fruit, berries, or raw nuts.

2. Protein bars: Despite what many believe, many snack bars are not much more nutritious than high-calorie candy bars. Many of the bars tested by *Consumer Reports* often contain soy protein or chicory root—less-than-wholesome ingredients—as protein sources. Calories in the bars tested ranged from 90 to 270 per serving; fat, from 2 to 9 grams; sugars, from 2 to 20 grams; fiber, from less than 1 gram to 9 grams.

Tip: Read the label of any bar you buy, to be sure you're not eating too much sugar. High-quality brands rated by *Consumer Reports* included: Kind Plus Cranberry Almond, Abound Pomegranate & Cranberry (CVS), Larabar Blueberry Muffin, Raw Revolution Cranberry Almond & Coconut, and Raw Revolution

Cranberry Almond & Coconut. Also: don't buy into the idea that protein bars are healthy alternatives to whole foods like lean beef, eggs, poultry, fish, beans, beans, and legumes.

3. Trail mix, granola: Many varieties of trail mix and granola contain unsalted nuts, seeds, dried fruits, oats, and other whole foods that are good for you. But be aware that some enhance flavor by adding sweeteners and candy-packing calorie counts of 300 or more and up to 20 grams of sugar per serving.

Tip: Read labels closely for serving sizes, calorie counts, and sugar levels.

4. Smoothies: A cool smoothie may seem like the perfect way to end a workout and some varieties do contain healthy vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and natural juices from fruits and vegetables. But be aware that some smoothies—particularly those with added chocolate or sugar—are little more than milkshakes masquerading as healthy beverages.

Tip: Check the ingredients label and make sure it contains low calories, and no more than 12-15 grams of carbohydrates or sugar per serving to guarantee you're not killing the health benefits of that workout.

5. Prepackaged salads. Many fast-food joints have added prepared salads to their menus. But some of those ready-to-eat salads contain 1,000 calories or more—as much as a conventional fast-food meal.

Tip: Avoid salads loaded with cheese, croutons, high-calorie dressings, and meats. Instead, choose salads with healthy ingredients you can see through the package—mostly fresh vegetables and greens. And be aware: baked or deep-fried veggie or fruit chips are not healthy alternatives to fresh produce. In fact, many products are simply potato chips with some veggie powder sprinkled on top, and they are typically loaded with calories, fat, sodium, and carbs.