

Healthier Snack Mixes

I am always on the look out for healthier snacks. However, prepackaged snacks often contain excess added sugar, salt, and refined grains. These ingredients make the snacks craveable and delicious, but they are **not something that we should eat frequently as part of a healthy diet**. Adorable little cheddar crackers contain too much sodium and mostly, if not all, refined grains. The cute cookies marketed to kids are mostly white flour and added sugar. I found it impossible to stay within the **recommended daily intake for added sugar** and **salt** while frequently eating prepackaged snacks.

Sure, there are **healthier prepackaged snacks**. However, it is hard to find snacks that are minimally processed, contain protein and fiber, and are low in added sugar and salt. Instead, I make my own snack mixes. By not limiting myself to one food, I am able to maximize good nutrients (protein, fiber, whole grains) while minimizing added sugar, sodium, and refined grains. And the snack mixes are a delicious combination of sweet and salty flavors.

How to create craveable healthier snack combinations

Food manufacturers optimize the amount of added sugar, salt and fat in their recipes to create foods we crave.¹ This optimization typically leads to foods that are delicious but not healthy. The same principles can be used to create nutritious and craveable snacks. By combining a few simple ingredients, you can create a delicious, healthier snack mix that will keep you fuller longer because it also contains protein and fiber.

1. Start with a good source of protein: nuts, seeds or roasted beans

Nuts, seeds and beans all provide good sources of plant-based protein. They also contain a reasonable amount of fiber and fat which helps you stay fuller longer. Choose a protein depending on personal likes, allergies, and other considerations. When I am making snack mixes, I typically use lightly salted roasted nuts or seeds because I prefer how they taste.

Favorite protein options: pecans, cashews, peanuts, pistachios, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, and roasted chickpeas.

2. Add favorite dried fruit for sweetness

Dried fruit is a key component of these snack mixes as they provide the natural sweetness. I only buy unsweetened dried fruit to minimize the amount of added sugar we eat snacks. This means I typically avoid adding banana chips and cranberries because they typically contain added sugar. For larger fruits, I cut them into bit size pieces using kitchen sheers.

Favorite dried fruit options: pineapple, mango, raisins, cherries, peaches, [strawberries](#), and apple chips.

3. Add puffed whole grains

Puffed grains like puffed wheat, rice and popcorn add a delicious crunch and texture to a snack mix. I always try to include at least one puffed grain because they are 100% whole grain and a good source of fiber. The less-processed aspect of these whole grains is important because as foods become more processed, they become easier to digest ([read more about whole grains](#)).

Favorite puffed grain options: popcorn and puffed kamut wheat (because it is larger and easier to eat).

4. Add a favorite healthier cereal or cracker

Do you have a [favorite cereal](#) that you would happily snack on daily? Does your child have a favorite cheesy cracker that they would live on if given the option? Add the healthiest version you can find to your snack mix. These snacks and cereals tend to be highly processed with added sugar, refined grains, and higher levels of sodium. But they can be added in small quantities to the snack mix to increase variety and flavor without compromising the healthfulness of the snack.

Favorite cereal and cracker options: wheat waffle cereal, Puffins, Cheerios, whole wheat Goldfish.

Healthier snack mix examples:

The three example snack combinations listed below have approximately 200 calories per 3/4 cup serving. Each snack mix provides 6 grams of protein and 3 to 4 grams of fiber while keeping the amount of added sugar below 2 grams (that is only half a teaspoon!).



Pecan, dried pineapple, puffed wheat and whole grain Goldfish crackers



Pumpkin seeds, dried mango, popcorn and Puffins cereal



Cashews, raisins, puffed wheat
and wheat waffle cereal

1. Pecan, pineapple, wheat puff, and whole wheat Goldfish (makes 1.5 cup, 2 servings):

- 40 grams roasted pecans (no added salt, 1/3 cup)
- 30 grams dried pineapple, cut into bite sizes (1/3 cup)
- 10 grams wheat puffs (1/2 cup)
- 15 grams whole grain Goldfish crackers (1/3 cup)

2. Pumpkin Seed, dried mango, popcorn, and Puffins cereal (makes 1.5 cup, 2 servings):

- 30 grams lightly salted, roasted pumpkin seeds (1/4 cup)
- 30 grams dried mango, cut into bite sizes (1/3 cup)
- 5 grams popcorn, lightly salted (1/2 cup)
- 20 grams Puffins cereal (1/2 cup)

3. Cashew, raisin, wheat puff and wheat waffle cereal (makes 1.5 cup, 2 servings):

- 40 grams lightly salted, roasted cashews (1/3 cup)
- 30 grams raisins (scant 1/4 cup)
- 10 grams wheat puffs (1/2 cup)
- 20 grams wheat waffle cereal (1/2 cup)

My current favorite snack is pictured in the main photo: **dried strawberries, maple cinnamon roasted pecans** and wheat puffs. It is crunchy, sweet and filling.

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References:

1. Salt, Sugar, Fat. Michael Moss, 2013 ([link](#))