

- Snack foods

Snacking is not bad for health

New Straits Times · 2 Oct 2023 · 10 · By ETX Daily Up

BOREDOM, stress, frustration or habit: snacking can be triggered by a variety of factors, but it often has a detrimental impact on body mass index and even certain metabolic diseases.



But contrary to popular belief, these daytime or nocturnal cravings are not necessarily bad for your health, a new study suggests. It all depends on what snacks you choose and the time of day you consume them.

We're snacking more and more, and at all hours of the day. Those were the findings from Mondelez International's Fourth Annual State of Snacking conducted with the Harris Poll and published in January.

According to that report, 64 per cent of consumers across 12 countries preferred to eat small meals throughout the day rather than fewer larger meals and there's a rise in morning snacking, as well as a rise in afternoon snacking. So is that good or bad? A team of researchers from King's College London provides some insight into the matter

HEALTH BENEFITS?

Snacking can be bad — or good — for your health, depending on how it's done. This is the finding of recent research involving 854 people from a study, the Zoe Predict programme, 95 per cent of whom said they regularly snacked.

Published in the European Journal of Nutrition, the research shows that almost half of snackers (47 per cent) consume two snacks a day, and 29 per cent eat more than two. But the surprise is that snacking isn't necessarily bad for your health. In fact, it may actually improve some aspects of it.

“Contrary to popular belief, the analysis showed that snacking is not unhealthy — as long as the snacks were healthy.

People who ate highquality snacks like nuts and fresh fruits frequently were more likely to have a healthy weight compared with those who don't snack at all or those who snack on unhealthy foods.

“Analysis also showed good quality snacks can also result in better metabolic health and decreased hunger,” the study said.

MINIMISE FAT AND SUGAR

But it's important to be aware that the nature of the snack can change the situation, turning benefit into harm.

The consequences can be even more serious, as the study shows that snacking can even cancel out the benefits of healthy meals. This is not an insignificant finding considering that cookies, cakes, pies, cereals and cheese are among the most commonly consumed snacks.

TIMING IS KEY

Another factor may prove decisive: the schedule at which we indulge in snacking.

While the Mondelez survey showed that people snack throughout the day, the new research demonstrates that snacks consumed after 9pm are “associated with poorer blood markers compared with all other snacking times”.

Once again, this could be due to the nature of the snacks eaten in the evening — often in front of the TV — and richer in fats and sugars.

In its recommendations for a healthy diet, the World Health Organisation advises that if you do snack, choose “fresh fruit and raw vegetables as snacks instead of sugary snacks”.