- Eating customs

The three-minute snack rule to stop afternoon cravings

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MANY assume that eating a healthy snack means settling for something boring or tasteless. When you think of it, what usually comes to mind are dry oats, bland celery sticks, gluten-free bread, or chia seeds. But it doesn't have to be that way at all.

Truth be told, blood sugar crashes often hit by mid-afternoon. That's usually when cravings start to creep in. You end up raiding the pantry or grabbing whatever is within reach. But eating with your eyes first isn't always the best idea. When you choose whatever is available, it's usually something sweet, salty, or oily. So you end up gobbling chips, demolishing a pizza, or finishing a plate of pancit. Then the guilt sets in — and the next day, the cycle repeats.

The fix isn't willpower — it's using a smarter formula that gives your body the fuel it actually needs. Here's a simple approach that can genuinely stop those mid-afternoon cravings: fiber plus protein or fat plus water.

Most people snack the wrong way. Let's be honest: we often get dehydrated, rushed, and stressed. And when that happens, we reach for comfort food.

As such, always start with water. About 80 percent of the time, "I'm hungry" really means "I'm thirsty." When that feeling hits, avoid grabbing food right away. Drink a glass of lukewarm water and wait 10 minutes. If you're still hungry, then your body is telling you the truth. This one habit alone cut my snacking urges in half.

The next thing you do is follow the "No Naked Carbs Rule." This means no carbs on their own — no plain pan de sal, no fries by themselves. Carbs alone spike your blood sugar and then crash it, which triggers more cravings. To keep your blood sugar steady, pair carbs with protein or healthy fat.

Bad: crackers only. Good: Crackers with sugar-free peanut butter. Another one is eating a banana alone. The better version of is to eat a banana with a handful of nuts. Bad: Taho floating in arnibal. Good: Taho with little or no arnibal plus chia seeds.

Suggested pairings include singkamas and a dash of sea salt, (or a little bagoong); sardines and crackers or one slice of wheat toast; hard-boiled egg and avocados with a slice of sourdough bread; 1/4 cup of nuts, frozen banana and cacao smoothie; Greek yogurt and half a yellow mango or apple slices; dark chocolate and green tea; tuna salad with one slice of bread (easy on the mayonnaise and the extra serving); bowl of misua with egg; arroz caldo with chicken and egg; dinuguan and puto, okoy with kalabasa; baked potatoes with cheese and olive oil drizzle. And there are more healthy treats if you learn to prepare them properly.

My all-time favorites include boiled or baked kamote minus the sugar and air-fried tofu cubes with potatoes. If you feel like having something hot, try barley and bean soup or lentils with veggies and chicken. Also, have on stand-by a supply of pumpkin or sunflower seeds.

The best way to honor your body is to treat it with care. Know and understand the effect food has on the body. Food is not good or bad. It is how we prepare it. What counts is how we eat it and how much of it we consume. Once you get used to this rationale, then eating with your health in mind will always show you the way.

Some might ask, “Is a burger healthy?” Yes, it can be healthy if the meat used is lean, the bread is whole wheat and the sandwich itself has veggies. As for fries, they are just like burgers — not bad, but prepared wrong. Watch out for the standard fries cooked in deep-fryer oil if you are watching calories. These are built for the crunch. Try the home version baked or air fried. You get the crunch minus the oil.

Here is a hack: Order the kid’s menu. It will have less salt and oil. However, if the craving hits you whether pizza or burger, go with friends. This way, you share the calories instead of consuming it all.

Affirmation: “Beginning today, I will become a smart eater.”

Love and light.