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6 Heart-y Snacks

Who doesn't like a good snack once in a while? I know I couldn't get through the day without a few well-planned snacks. Many people try (usually unsuccessfully) to steer clear of snacking because the word conjures images of candy, cookies, chips, and other less-than-healthy fare. But there are plenty of satisfying options that are not only healthful but also benefit your heart and the cardiovascular system. Here's just a sampling—six guilt-free snacks you can indulge in once or twice a day, depending on your calorie needs and activity level:

1) Edy's Antioxidant Fruit Bars: Not your average popsicles, these frozen treats are packed with real fruit such as antioxidant-rich blueberries and pomegranates. With about 60 to 70 calories a serving, it's tough to beat these for a refreshing snack.

2) Fiber One Chewy Bars: Think granola bars for grown-ups. These are loaded with fiber, which helps keep blood cholesterol levels in check. One bar contains about 140 calories and 4 grams of fat as well as a whopping 9 grams of fiber. If you're watching your calories and need something a bit smaller, try the 90-calorie variety, which has 2 grams of fat but still boasts 5 grams of fiber.

3) Edamame: These little nutrition nuggets are packed with soy protein, which has been shown to help lower LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels. In addition, they contain fiber, polyunsaturated fats, and monounsaturated fats—all of which are good for the heart.

4) Popcorn: You can't go wrong with fiber-rich, air-popped popcorn. But when you want a grab-and-go snack, a good choice is Popcorn Indiana Original Kettlecorn or Smoked Cheddar Popcorn.

5) Planter's NUT-rition Heart Healthy Mix: This is more than your average nut blend. A substantial amount of research has shown that nuts offer a variety of benefits to your heart. With this nut mix, you get almonds, walnuts, hazelnuts, pistachios, and more all in one can.

6) Kashi GOLEAN Crunch! Honey Almond Flax: Cereal isn't just for breakfast. Take ½ cup or so of this cereal in a baggie or airtight reusable bowl when you need a little crunch while you're on the go. And since it's loaded with fiber, protein, and omega-3 fatty acids, it makes a satisfying, good-for-your-heart snack. ♣

— Heidi Reichenberger McIndoo, MS, RD, LDN