

# 10 healthy office snacks for busy, working women

Free guide from nutritionist Catherine Saxelby

A FOODWATCH GUIDE TO HEALTHY EATING

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Hi there. I'm a big snacker as I have a smallish stomach capacity and can't fit in three square meals with nothing in between. I prefer to eat smaller meals and top up in between with a small snack of some sort to keep me going.

I know you've been told to eat fruit as a snack and it's healthy and helps you reach your suggested target of two pieces of fruit a day. However sometimes an apple or mandarin – delicious and nutritious though they are – just doesn't cut it. I want variety and I want something a little more filling and (dare I say it?) convenient when I'm flat out.

Snacks are a real problem in the modern diet, in my humble opinion. Most of us can fix a healthy breakfast, order a salad or open sandwich for lunch, and cook up a grill or stir-fry for dinner. Heck every night on the TV, I watch those clever celebrity chefs showing me how to whip up dinner in 15 minutes or so.

It's all those in betweens that play havoc with our total food intake and healthy eating. I'm thinking of things that are either:

- fatty and sugary (like chocolate bars, muffins, doughnuts, lollies and biscuits) or
- fatty and salty (bags of crisps or corn chips, pizza, fries or savoury crackers).

Most modern-day snacks are a nutrition disaster and one of the real reasons why many of us are gaining too much weight.

Most snacks are 'processed' and don't contribute any of the essential nutrients we need for health. They are high GI so they are rapidly digested and absorbed – and leave us hungry again soon. They pack a lot of kilojoules into a small volume so we overeat before our stomachs feel full.

What's more, they come in large portions that are easy to over-consume. Think of those buckets of movie popcorn, jumbo bags of potato chips, boxes of savoury crackers, family blocks of chocolate that always get eaten, lollies and litre tubs of ice creams.

To make things worse, snacking has become mindless eating in front of the TV or on the computer! When questioned in dietary surveys, most of us fail to recall what we ate between meals.

We 'forget' the biscuit with our morning coffee, the pack of crisps on the way home in the car, the nibbles before dinner and the popcorn at the movies.

## Choosing healthy snacks

Snacks should be smaller in size and lower in both kilojoules (calories) and fat than meals. Choose snacks that are low in salt, low in added sugar and high in fibre. Here are my favourite choices.

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### Why we snack

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*We tend to snack for a lot of reasons – it may be due to hunger, ... or it may be impulse, emotions, boredom or sometimes just out of pure habit. Snacking is normal and can have heaps of benefits if done correctly. If you choose to include snacks into your diet, it's important that they don't become mini-meals, as this often results in weight gain or an unsuccessful weight loss attempt.*

## 5 snacks to keep in the desk drawer

Keep a stash of these long-life items in your desk at work for times when you can't get out to grab something fresh.

### 1. Snack packs of almonds, walnuts or unsalted mixed nuts

I love snacking on nuts but have to watch my intake as I can happily down 50g or 75g in one sitting. So on the weekends I make up 4 or 5 snack packs to have on hand when working. Allow a good handful or 40-50g nuts. If you have high cholesterol, nuts make the perfect go-to snack as they deliver heart-smart nutrients like monounsaturated fat, fibre, magnesium and vitamin E.

I do find trail mixes more interesting than straight nuts. But both have their place. At times I'll pack up 3-4 dried apricots with pecans or almonds to snack on. Or dried cranberries which team well with walnuts or a few Brazils.

### 2. Tiny tins of tuna

I like these small portable cans with interesting flavours like lemon and chilli, onion, tomato. Ring-pull lids make them easy to open and there are some with almost no liquid which saves a messy desk. Keep a couple of plastic forks handy so you can down one. High in protein, zinc and iron which most women need. Don't forget there are now combo-packs of wholegrain crackers packaged up with tinned tuna which are so handy.

### 3. Crunchy peanut butter

Spread it on wholegrain crackers or a rice cake or on celery lengths if you are on a diet. I prefer the thickish, crunchy kind as it tastes more like real peanuts. A small jar is a great stand-by in the office.

### 4. Pumpernickel or crispbread with cheese

Long-life pumpernickel makes a filling wholesome snack topped with cheese. Alternatively opt for single-serve stay-fresh packs of wholegrain crispbread or crackers or rice cakes. Aim for

- 8-10 wholegrain rice crackers or
- 2-3 multigrain corn thins or
- 3-4 Vita-Weats or rye crispbread

Nothing is quicker than cheese and it adds protein and bone-building calcium. Or opt for a tub of cottage cheese or ricotta that you bring in on the Monday for the week.

### 5. Nut bars

These look like the usual muesli bar but have nuts instead of grains. Some have no fruit, some are mixes of nuts with sultanas, apricots and apple. I really like Be Natural nut bars as well as Go Natural. They fit in my handbag well.

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### *My favourite energy boosters at the desk*

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*Take a short stretch break at your desk especially if you're on a computer. This sends fresh oxygenated blood to your head, neck and shoulders and help muscles stay soft.*

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*Laugh hard - a funny story or joke lifts your spirits and clears the cobwebs. For inspiration, subscribe to one of the free Joke-a-day sites that deliver a daily joke into your Inbox.*

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*Put a dab of tea tree oil or eucalyptus oil on a tissue on your desk or in a drawer. Inhale when your energy flags. I find the lovely menthol-like aroma perks me up when I need to get something written.*

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## 5 snacks to pop in the office fridge

### 1. Tub of yoghurt

Yoghurt is good as it's high in protein and calcium, low GI and lasts the distance too. Don't bother with the diet types. They're too flimsy and not sustaining. Buy a regular plain or fruit yoghurt or one of the lighter Greek yoghurts. I like to buy Black Swan, Chobani, Farmer's Union or Barambah brands.

### 2. Avocado

Nothing easier than a small avocado to get you through the mid-afternoon slump. Buy one that's a size that you can eat in one sitting. Squeeze the end slightly to see if it's ripe. Avo's make a great low-carb snack and give you healthy monounsaturated fats like the ones in olive oil. I like them as they're filling so take you through to dinner.

### 3. V8 or tomato juice

These come in individual tetra-packs of 150ml and can tide you over if you're going out for dinner. They add a rich savoury flavour instead of the sweetness of fruit which is more refreshing in hot weather.

### 4. Raisin loaf

A snack doesn't have to come in a pack. A thick slice of fruit bread with a tablespoon of cottage cheese or cheddar is filling and sweet.

### 5. Low-fat choc milk

If you can dip into the milk in the fridge, have a glass of chilled low-fat milk with a tablespoon Milo/Actavite/Jarraah and a wheatmeal biscuit. Or a cup of Ovaltine Light Break. Good for protein and calcium.

## What to look for in a bought snack?

Most bought snacks are more than a quick bite – they’re really a mini-meal. So if you’re not working hard physically, keep your snacks small.

### Nutrition numbers

Look for snacks that have

- less than: 600 kilojoules (150 calories) per serve
- less than 3 grams of ‘bad’ saturated fat per serve
- less than 450 milligrams of sodium (salt) per 100 grams
- less than 15 grams of sugars per serve

### Things to check

- If you buy a low-fat or light product, be careful that it’s not high in sugar. Always check the nutrition information panel.
- If the snacks are whole grain or high-fibre OR supply important nutrients such as calcium, iron or protein, that’s a bonus.
- Plus if they have low GI carbs (such as yoghurt, baked beans, pears, apples, nuts), they’ll stick with you longer.
- Create a portion. Don't just open a pack of nuts or crackers and munch mindlessly - take out what you need, put it on a plate or bowl and secure the rest.

## The final word

**Remember – your aim is to have a snack that’s filling, satisfies your hunger and doesn’t leave you hungry again in less than an hour, but you don’t want one that’s hefty or is overloaded with fat, salt, sugar and kilojoules.**

# Getting the most from the Foodwatch website

## The Blog

All my articles are now to be found in the blog section. If you click on it you will see a drop down menu with all the different categories of articles such as Fast food, Healthy Weight Loss, Hot Issues and more. The more recent the article, the closer to the top of the page it will appear. All the latest articles also appear on the Home Page, irrespective of which category they belong to, so you'll always be able to see the latest content easily.

## The Reviews

From time to time I see a new product that I think is important to review and let you know how it stacks up nutritionally and for convenience and taste. You'll find all my reviews in this section. Occasionally manufacturers ask me to review a product and I charge them for this service but it's important to note here that payment for review does NOT guarantee a good review. At Foodwatch we always "tell it like it is".

## The Recipes

Of course we also have our popular recipe section. The recipes can be searched using the Alphabetic Search at the top of the section or by Nutritional Rating, Allergy/Intolerance, Cuisine, Main Ingredient, Cooking Method, Course/Dish and Difficulty.

## My Mailbox

I receive a lot of questions. I've compiled them into a Mailbox section of their own and here you can find the answers to many nutritional problems such as "How can a product be labelled 'cholesterol free' if it's high in fat?" and "What is the difference between Greek yoghurt and natural yoghurt?". I've organised the Questions into nine sub-sections to make it easier to find what you're looking for.

These sub-sections are:

- Special diets for medical problems
- Food in Focus
- Keeping food safe
- Fats and oils
- Eating to boost energy
- Feeding kids
- Additives & food labels
- Nutrients you need
- Drinks

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### *How to find what you're looking for*

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*We have a comprehensive search function and you can find the search box in the top of the right column. Also there you can see a list of tags used to classify the articles. The larger the tag the more times it has been used. If you click on one of the tags you will get a list of all articles tagged with that word. So if you click on "weight loss", for example, you'll get a list of all articles that deal with this subject.*

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eat right ● lose weight ● boost your energy

**About Catherine Saxelby**

Catherine Saxelby BSc, Grad Dip Nutr Dietetics (Syd), AN, APD, MAIFST is an accredited nutritionist, award-winning author and food commentator. She is the author of 10 books including the best-selling Nutrition for Life and lately the Food and Nutrition Companion (Hardie Grant Books). She writes nutrition columns for magazines and blogs. Want to eat better and have more energy? You'll find heaps more articles, recipes and facts sheets at Catherine's website [www.foodwatch.com.au](http://www.foodwatch.com.au)