

My co-workers and I just returned from a road trip this week. We traveled to Baton Rouge to attend a three-day training. We always enjoy traveling together. It gives us a chance to share work ideas and catch up with each other's family. One thing we all have in common is we like to snack on these long trips. Any time we stop for gas or bathroom break, we meet each other at the checkout counter with our munchies.

Snacking is a great way to tame your hunger. But I think we might be purchasing these munchies out of habit. We have always done it! Snacking is not a bad thing. It helps prevent us from getting so hungry between meals, which might prevent us from over eating. One thing to remember is that we must include snacks when we look at our total daily food intake. Snacking is not invisible calories. When I ask people to record everything they eat for our Smart Portions program, many times they leave off snacking or small bites of tasting food. It all counts!

Planning is the key to everything in life. Food is no exception to the rule! When you take road trips it is good to plan for healthy snacks. If I am traveling alone snacks help refresh me and keep me alert. Here are some healthy snacks you might think about taking on your next road trip:

Nuts are very good for your health. They are rich in energy, protein, packed with antioxidants, vitamins, minerals and omega 3 fatty acids. Pack a jar or plastic container with a variety of nuts like pistachios, almonds, and peanuts. Add a little coconut, tropic fruit, dried strawberries or cherries for a little sweet flavor. Try to limit yourself to a handful.

Fruits are a good source nutrients and they are easy to pack. They can be packaged together or separate in plastic bags or containers. If it's a long trip bring a small ice chest to chill your fruit. Wash up and bag up grapes, strawberries, blackberries, blueberries - just pick your favorite berry to take along. Fresh watermelon, honeydew melon and cantaloupe can be cut up and packaged in plastic containers for a refreshing stop along the way.

Vegetables provide us with fiber, folate, iron, magnesium, potassium, vitamin A and other nutrients to keep us healthy. They are easy to pack and the driver can eat them with ease and sometimes with a little assistance from the passenger. Last week a friend shared a great vegetable snack. He peeled and sliced a sweet potato which we dipped in hummus. Hummus is a Middle Eastern food made with chick peas or garbanzo beans and tahini. Hummus paste has a similar texture to peanut butter. You can find it in the deli section of the grocery store or you can make your own. It is easy to make. If you can't find the ingredient tahini paste, you can make your own from sesame seeds and vegetable oil. When making your own hummus you can adjust the flavors by adding garlic, lemon juice, and your favorite seasonings. Hummus is usually eaten with flat bread, but many vegetables can be used with this dip, bell peppers, carrots, zucchini, celery, cucumbers, broccoli, asparagus, I think you get idea—your favorite vegetable with hummus. There are many recipes on the internet on how to make hummus. You don't have to dip the vegetables, just enjoy them raw. The crunch of the raw vegetable will keep you awake and satisfied.

Air popped popcorn is another snack easy to make and take with you. Add a twist to the popcorn by adding a sweet or savory topping. Spray the air popped popcorn with a vegetable spray then sprinkle a tasty topping like parmesan cheese, garlic powder, dry Italian seasoning dressing, dry Ranch dressing, chili seasoning, or add your favorite seasoning in your cupboard.

Next time you take a long road trip plan for a few healthy snacks. You will save money and calories.