

Dear Healthy NJ Nurses,

I like my snacks like I like my vacations: memorable. Many nurses get one break per day besides lunch, and they should make every bite and sip count. That snack can include something fresh and flavorful—with staying power of course. Don't forget that glass of water. At the end of your shift, *you* don't want to be the *nurse* "at risk for fluid and electrolyte imbalance."

I love an open-faced anything. Take a variation of fresh things and layer them on a piece of whole grain bread. In my book, the queen of all of these is avocado with tomato and sliced, hard-boiled eggs or smoked salmon. Top it with some of that "everything bagel" seasoning or a little sprinkle of sea salt. You can do a thin slice of cheese, some turkey and juicy, ripe tomato. Have you given fiber-filled Swedish crispbread a try? Hummus, or for convenience, a little spreadable light cheese wedge can serve as a nice base. Sliced apples, pears or persimmons and cheese are a wonderful sweet and savory pairing. Also, try layering colorful, thinly sliced radishes and carrots or cucumbers over a generous spackling of hummus on a multigrain bread or cracker. An itchy-bitsy sprinkle of salt will make their flavors pop. If one day you don't have much time for meal prep at home, keep a sharp enough knife in your lunch bag so that you can slice things up on the spot. The act of preparation can take your mind out of work and focused on your meal.

When you're craving something sweeter, try plain yogurt with berries and granola (just choose the granola with the lowest sugar). As a variation, toss in healthy items like oats, chia, flax and pepitas. If plain yogurt is too tart for you, a thin drizzle of honey is better than a pre-sweetened yogurt. For more flavor, add a few drops of vanilla. Here's a plug for berries: they are associated with cardiac health (Corliss, 2021). Healthy nurses, *whatever* you can do to reduce your intake of [added sugars](#) and increase your consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables is aligned with national health improvement goals; we need to talk the talk *and* walk the walk on this stuff (DeSilva & Anderson-Villaluz, 2021).

Some other considerations...

Leftovers are certainly better than no snack. "Waste not, want not," my mother used to say. A small portion of something you ate for dinner conserves money *and* your food resources. At one of our recent HNHNJ Meetings, a nursing student asked, "Well what if all you have is a cold piece of pizza?" Well, I say, it's only one slice...and please heat it up. If all you have is that slice of white-flour pizza, enjoy it! Good nutrition happens over a lifetime, and treats are okay now and again. Don't forget the water. If you are always on the go, keep an apple or two in your bag. Nature wrapped them for convenience. A friend of mine swears by them for staving off the munchies.

If you are trying to lose weight, or maintain a healthy weight, making snacks from whole foods is best. Bean or [lentil](#) salads are filling and rich in fiber. Surprisingly, they are low on the [glycemic index](#), so you get that filling, comfort food satisfaction but they won't spike your glucose after a meal. They can be mixed with all sorts of vegetables and a bit of red onion to make zesty salads. Add a little [healthy oil](#), some [vinegar](#) and herbs. Consider making [a bean dip](#) for a single serving of your favorite tortilla chips or veggies. If you enjoy veggie pasta salad, be sure to choose a multi-grain pasta or one with some chickpea or lentil flour. The use of fresh herbs will boost flavor, visual appeal and in the case of parsley, will add antioxidants and

nutrients. Don't worry about making these salads every day; make a batch and use it for two or three days.

Lastly, popcorn is a great on-the-go snack and source of fiber. It is low on the glycemic index and will keep you feeling full. Hot air [popcorn makers](#) are the healthiest way to go, as no oil is needed for cooking. You can always spray on a little healthy oil (look for ones without propellants) and add whatever seasoning appeals to you. Seal it up in a big bag and take it on the go. Though slightly less eco-friendly, some microwaveable brands are healthy and good in a pinch. For anyone who tends to come home and raid the fridge, a little snack like popcorn on the ride home can provide you with the satiety you need to avoid impulsive food choices when you get in the door.

Healthy Nurses, if you have any other whole food snack suggestions, please snap a picture and post it to our [Facebook group](#). If you do not have a Facebook account, please send your ideas to [healthynurse@njsna.org](mailto:healthynurse@njsna.org) In New Jersey, we are so blessed to be part of such a diverse, multicultural group with varied culinary traditions. We can expose each other to different flavor combinations, using herbs and spices that may not be familiar to us. Maybe you have a healthy twist on a traditional recipe? Please share!

Take good care of yourselves.

Warmly,

Lisa Ertle, BA, RN and the Healthy Nurse Healthy New Jersey Team

### References

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