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Snack Attack

Munch on the latest trends in salty, crunchy chips

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You can't have just one. But that's alright as long as you're crunching on the latest generation of healthier chips. Though some might still be addictive, chips—and snacks in general—don't need to be guilt-inducing.

"Snacks should be part of a complete and healthy diet," says Keri Glassman, RD, author of *The Snack Factor Diet* (Three Rivers Press, 2008). "Studies show that snackers consume fewer calories overall. If you snack, you stabilize blood-sugar levels. You can reduce LDL [bad] cholesterol levels. You are healthier and happier. And you are less famished when you get to your next meal, so you make better choices then."

The trick to healthy snacking is to be choosy. Glassman recommends picking 140- to 200-calorie bites, and eating them two to three times a day, depending on the size and frequency of your meals. Snacks can be a piece of fruit or a handful of nuts. But as people return to carbohydrates after a low-carb phase, snack manufacturers have created good-for-you options to feed customers' cravings for salty, crunchy chips. "I've seen a lot of healthier chips on the market," Glassman says. Here are the latest snack trends to munch on.

Get Real

"We're seeing a trend toward 'real' food—all-natural ingredients you can recognize and nothing artificial," says Michelle Peterman, vice president of marketing at Salem, Ore.-based Kettle Foods. Kettle Brand Baked Potato Chips are made with whole slices of real potatoes, for example.

The reason customers are hungry for natural and organic snacks is that "they're looking for safety and reliability," says Keith Belling, CEO of all-natural Pop Chips, based in San Francisco. For example, Dan and Jean Ehrlich launched the snack-food company Rock-N-Roll Gourmet because they were looking for natural alternatives for themselves and their kids—and they couldn't find them at their regular haunts. As musicians, the husband-and-wife team spends plenty of time at music festivals and events, and they noticed that people would either go hungry or grab the readily available high-fat, chemical-laden chips. "Where's the healthy snack food?" asked Dan, a father of three. "We thought there must be a better way." Soon after his observation, their Hippy Chips, a baked potato chip with hempseeds, was born.

Taste matters

Baked and popped chips, whether made from whole grains, flour, or potatoes, are all the rage because they are lower in fat and calories than the typical fried variety. But if the chip sacrifices taste, customers won't be loyal, according to Belling of Pop Chips. "When it comes to something like a snack, which [people think of as] an indulgence, you have to lead with taste," Belling says. "If you give customers something that doesn't taste good, they'll go back to the fried chip that they were trying to avoid in the first place."

The company saw a chance to appeal to both customers' taste for flavor and nutrition by applying a unique process to potatoes, making them act like kernels of corn under heat and pressure. "They literally pop into a chip," says Belling. Because the company doesn't use oil to make the base chip, they can add a bit of flavorful oil and spices later and still end up with a chip that has less than half of the

fat and fewer calories than a typical fried chip. The fried variety usually has about 10 grams of fat and 150 calories per one-ounce serving, according to Belling. Pop chips have 4 grams of fat and 120 calories a serving.

But all this health mumbo-jumbo is just a bonus, if you ask Belling. "We're not shouting from the rooftops that this is a healthy chip," he says. "We're saying this is a great-tasting chip, which, by the way, happens to be better for you."

Kettle Foods has a similar philosophy when it comes to pleasing the palates of long-time consumers of their fried chips. As well as a couple new flavors like Aged White Cheddar and Hickory Honey Barbeque, the company has created a baked version of the popular Sea Salt & Vinegar chip. The adaptation has 65 percent less fat—and all the same flavor, according to Kettle Foods' Peterman.

Put the fun in functional

Healthy snacks should offer something more redeeming—such as fiber or protein—than just calories, according to Glassman. Seconding that motion is Rally Ralston, managing partner of Salba Smart Natural Products, a raw-ingredient supplier of salba and maker of salba-enriched tortilla chips, pretzels and other food products. "People don't want empty calories," Ralston says. "They want better nutrition." According to Ralston, the satiating salba grain is a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, vegetable protein, potassium, iron, calcium and more. A 2007 clinical study in *Diabetes Care* showed that salba (*Salvia hispanica L*) helps control type 2 diabetes. Salba also can absorb up to 14 times its weight in water, so manufacturers generally don't offer the whole grain and instead add it to products to make a functional food. "You can incorporate salba into anything," Ralston says.

Rock-N-Roll Gourmet enhances its baked Hippy Chips with omega-3-rich hemp. "It's not enough hemp to make the chips nutritionally different," says owner Dan Ehrlich. "But it adds another tasty twist. It also falls in line with trying to support more sustainable products." To make its chips stand out even more when placed on crowded snack-aisle shelves, Rock-N-Roll Gourmet has created lively packaging, musically themed product names, and inventive flavors. The new Little Wings are baked buffalo-wing chips with blue cheese or ranch drizzle. The Sweet Emotions are multi-grain chips topped with cinnamon-white chocolate or berry-yogurt drizzle. "We wanted to create a snack food that was healthy in terms of low fat, had a lighter feeling when you ate it so you didn't feel bloated, and also combined colorful packaging that evoked a positive feeling," Ehrlich says. "Especially in difficult times right now, people want to feel good. Snacks are a comfort food."

Powerful portions

Almost every snack manufacturer now offers a single-serving package to help customers with portion control. Usually, these add up to 100 calories or fewer. That may be enough to tide some people over until mealtime, but if customers follow Glassman's snack rules—that is, getting some protein or fiber and up to 200 calories—they'll want to put together foods for a healthier combination. For example, add peanut butter to multigrain crackers or cottage cheese to chips. "If it's just a baked chip, you can add something else to make it a more balanced snack," Glassman says.

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