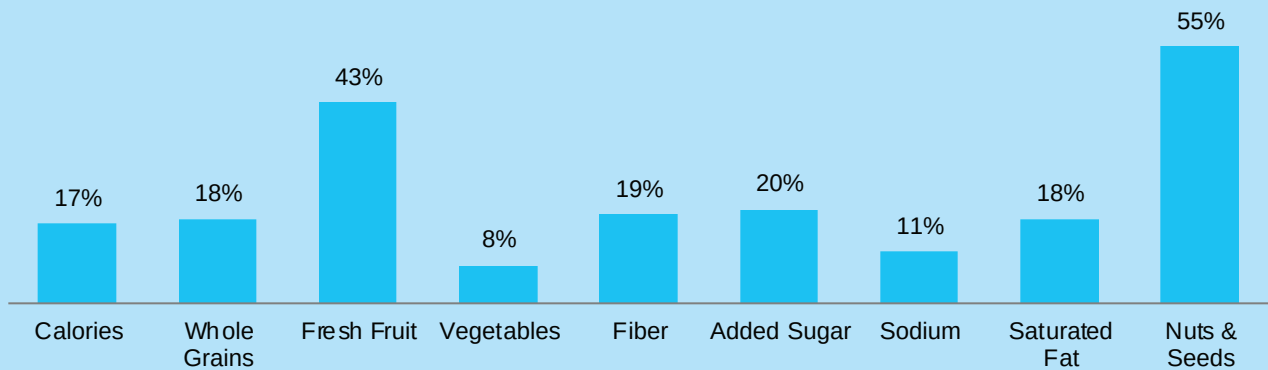# Nutritious snacking to help bridge nutrient gaps

**Snacking is an important part of the diet, with the average adult consuming about three snacks per day.[1]
At the same time, current dietary intake patterns suggest fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy are under-consumed by 85% of US adults.[2] With people already snacking, why not make snacks an opportunity to help fill these gaps?**

Snacks can be a major contributor of recommended nutrients and food groups. The chart below shows how much of Americans' daily intake of key food groups and nutrients comes from foods eaten as snacks.[1]

Proportion of total intake for key food groups/nutrients that is supplied by food snacks

Calories	Whole Grains	Fresh Fruit	Vegetables	Fiber	Added Sugar	Sodium	Saturated Fat	Nuts & Seeds
17%	18%	43%	8%	19%	20%	11%	18%	55%

These analyses represent food only and do not include beverages, which are sometimes consumed as snacks. Also, while some typical snack foods (e.g. crackers, chips, fruit) are consumed as snacks as well as with meals, this data represents snacks alone.

Defining snacks: NHANES defines snacks as all eating occasions not identified as breakfast, lunch, dinner/supper or brunch by participants.[1]

Top snack foods in the US[1]

Fresh fruit:
Bananas, apples, oranges and grapes

Sweet snacks:
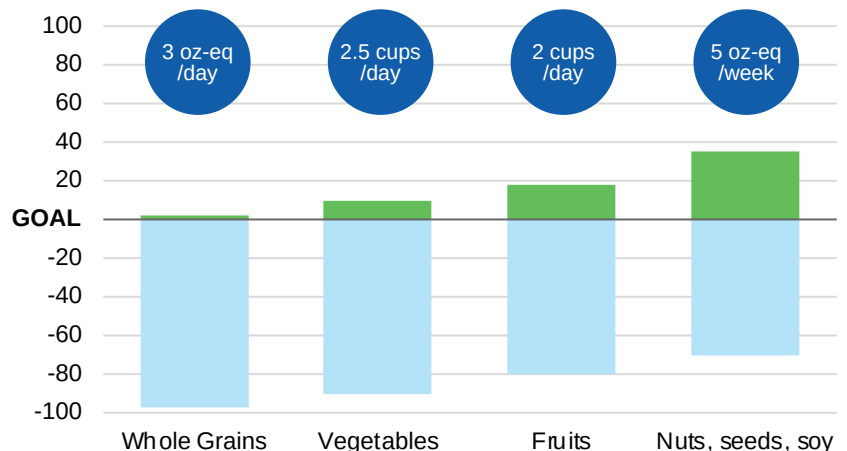Chocolate chip cookies, vanilla ice cream, hard candy, chocolate candy

Salty snacks:
Pretzels

Dairy:
Cheese

Dietary intakes compared to recommendations: Percent of US population age 1 and up who are meeting or below each dietary goal[2]

	Whole Grains	Vegetables	Fruits	Nuts, seeds, soy
	3 oz-eq /day	2.5 cups /day	2 cups /day	5 oz-eq /week

WHOLE GRAINS

- Snacks can be a great source of whole grains, with approximately 18% of US adults' total whole grain intake coming from snacks.[1]
- Whole grains can be a significant, cost-effective source of B vitamins, minerals and fiber.[3]

VEGETABLES

- Currently 8% of total vegetable intake comes from snacks,[1] with lots of room to grow.
- Diets that provide high vegetable intake are linked to improved digestive health and reduced risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity and some cancers.[4]

FRESH FRUIT

- Snacking contributes significantly to fresh fruit intake; around 43% of whole fruit consumption comes from snacks.[1]
- Fruit is an important source of vitamins and minerals, including vitamin C, fiber and potassium.[4]

NUTS & SEEDS

- On average, over half of dietary nuts and seeds intake in the US is from snacks.[2]
- Evidence suggests consuming nuts as part of a diet low in saturated fat may help lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease.[5]

FIBER

- Only around 5% of Americans get the recommended amount of dietary fiber they need each day.[6]
- Increasing consumption of fruits, vegetables, nuts and whole grains as part of snacks provides an opportunity to help adults increase their fiber intake.

Snack ideas that may complement a balanced eating pattern*

* The health benefits mentioned above cannot be achieved by consuming these foods alone, which should be consumed as part of a balanced eating pattern.

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2. U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. 9th Edition. December 2020. Available online: https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf

3. Brauchla M, Fulgoni VL. Public Health Nutrition. 2021 Feb 8:1-8

4. Slavin JL, Lloyd B. Advances in Nutrition. 2012 Jul 3(4) 506-516

5. Ros E. Nutrients. 2010 2(7):652-82

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