Snacking consumption among adults in the United States: a scoping review

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Among adults, snacking influences consumption of energy and critical nutrients. Snacking can be driven by internal or external cues but ultimately, reflects individual decisions that could be influenced through nutrition education.

A standard definition of a snack could strengthen snack-based information and could further progress development of policies and nutrition programming, ultimately contributing to diet quality, health, and wellbeing.

### Background
- Snacks are a staple of the American diet, with most U.S. adults consuming 1 to 3 snacks/day.
- Snacks contribute approximately 20% of energy intake and can enhance or detract from a pattern of healthy eating.
- Snacking may be a response to physiological or emotional "hunger" for energy and/or satiety.
- Context is a key determinant of food selection, eating, and food consumption behaviors.
- In adults, snacking occurs in a variety of settings and times.
- Eating occasions outside of breakfast, lunch and dinner are generally referred to as snacks.

### Objective
To characterize snacks and snacking occasions of U.S. adults, to further inform healthy eating practices.

### Design
- The protocol was prepared following the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews.
- Three web databases were used to identify articles using snacking or eating occasions as primary or secondary outcomes among U.S. adults.
- This review targeted articles published between 2010 and 2022.

### Screening Process
- A two-stage screening process was used where data was thematically analyzed (Flow diagram):
  - Stage 1: Title screening.
  - Stage 2: Abstract screening.
- During the process 31 of 4795 publications were identified as meeting inclusion criteria.

### Results
- Snacking tends to be an individual eating event but has no universally applied definition.
- The influence of snack timing on food selection and quality was highlighted.
- Three basic themes related to snacking were identified:
  - Primary characteristics of snacking emerged as:
    - Quality (healthy vs. unhealthy)
    - Timing (outside typical mealtimes)
    - Convenience (grab-and-go)

### Conclusions
- Among adults, snacking influences consumption of energy and critical nutrients. Snacking can be driven by internal or external cues but ultimately, reflects individual decisions that could be influenced through nutrition education.
- A standard definition of a snack could strengthen snack-based information and could further progress development of policies and nutrition programming, ultimately contributing to diet quality, health, and wellbeing.

**References:**

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