

Munch on Raisins for a Healthy Snack

One of the oldest foods in human history, raisins are a great way to keep your energy levels steady.

Raisins are a top energy source. They sustain blood sugar levels longer than other energy foods, but don't have the letdown that's often associated with other foods.

The California Raisin Marketing Board says the list of health benefits associated with raisins keeps growing. In a study done on the effect of raisins on cholesterol, subjects with elevated cholesterol ate a diet high in fiber and low in fats. The diet included raisins, which are shown to contain 4 grams of fiber per one and one-half ounce serving. Those who followed the diet lowered their cholesterol levels and reduced their risk of heart disease.

Other studies show that raisins are rich in antioxidants, which help to prevent heart disease and cancer. Research sponsored by the World Health Organization also shows that raisins are one of the top contributors of boron to the diet. Boron has beneficial effects on the bones and the brain and helps to metabolize such nutrients as calcium, copper, and nitrogen.

If you want to control your blood pressure, raisins are one of the best snacks for you. They're a good source of potassium, a mineral that has been shown to lower high blood pressure. Another benefit is that they don't spoil. You can put a box or two in your lunch box or drawer and enjoy a healthy snack anytime.

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Fruit Smoothies: A Healthy Treat

In the busyness of today's society, many people are turning to the slew of nutrient-packed shakes available on the market. There are weight-loss shakes with a tad less fat, energy shakes with a touch more carbohydrate, and body-building shakes with a bit more protein. They come in a can or in a powder form that requires a spin through the blender with water, milk, or juice. And there are also chains of stores that have made a terrific business out of making shakes, or smoothies, for their customers.

The question is: Are these shakes and smoothies as healthy as they're touted to be? They're certainly a better choice than downing several soft drinks during the day along with french fries or chips and calling it a lunch. The problem with nutrition-on-the-go is the lack of the complex collection of nutrients found in a balanced meal. As a meal substitute, they lack adequate fiber and valuable phytochemicals such as isoflavones, carotenoids, and other plant-derived compounds that get you well and keep you well. Even fruit- and dairy-based smoothies don't comprise a whole healthy diet – although they can be great

as a snack or part of a meal.

The basic smoothie recipe is a no-brainer: wash and cut fruit, add juice and a protein (yogurt, milk, or soy milk), and blend with ice. **Here are several tips on how you can make healthy smoothies at home:**



- ❖ Keep the calories low by sticking to unsweetened (no sugar added) fresh or frozen fruit.

- ❖ To make your smoothie thicker: spread diced fruit on a cookie sheet and freeze it for two to four hours. Transfer the pieces of fruit to resealable bags when hard and add the frozen fruit to your smoothie recipes.

You can also purchase frozen unsweetened strawberries, peaches, blueberries, raspberries, and melon.

- ❖ For creamier smoothies: let the ice sit at room temperature for 10 minutes before blending. The smaller the ice cubes the better – fill your trays half full or set the automatic ice maker to the smallest setting.

- ❖ Experiment! Flavor your smoothies with pure vanilla extract, freshly grated ginger, chopped fresh mint, or a small dab of peanut butter. Try using silken tofu instead of yogurt, or buttermilk instead of low-fat milk.

MOM'S TROPICAL FRUIT SALAD

Makes 16 servings

- 2 packets of unflavored gelatin
- 4 cups unsweetened white grape juice
- 1 large can (28 oz.) unsweetened, crushed pineapple
- 2 packages (8 oz. each) fat-free cream cheese
- 1 small can of mandarin oranges, rinsed and drained

In a medium saucepan, add gelatin to 1 cup white grape juice and let dissolve. Place pan on burner and gently heat on

medium-high, adding remaining juice and drained juice from canned pineapple. Stir constantly, and remove from heat as the mixture begins to thicken. Add two packages of softened cream cheese and beat with electric mixer or in food processor.

Add pineapple and mandarin oranges. Let chill 3 to 4 hours or until firm. Cut into pieces to serve.



From Pamela Smith's *Eat Well, Live Well*. Visit www.pamsmith.com for more information.

Each serving contains: 68 calories, 4 g. protein, 0 g. fat, 15 mg. cholesterol, 13 g. carbohydrates, 125 mg. sodium. Calories from fat 0 percent

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