Some might say a wise cracker is someone who cracks jokes, a jester, a fool or a prankster. A wise cracker may be someone who makes flippant remarks or uses puns often.

For example:
I wondered why the baseball was getting bigger, and then it hit me.
Or this one:
If Barbie is so popular, why do you have to buy her friends?
Or maybe:
Why is it that doctors call what they do practice?

Legendary wise-cracker Rodney Dangerfield famously said, “Take my wife...please.”

But consider for a moment that another definition of a wise cracker could be a healthy choice from a collection of crispy bread-like snacks.

Choosing healthy snacks is not often associated with having fun but maybe we can change that.

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What is snacking and how can we get wise about it? Why should we carrot all about snacking healthy? Well, maybe we should taco ‘bout it.

Each of us probably has his/her own version of what we think a snack is and so there are as many different types of snacks as there are people. Wikipedia states a snack is simply a small portion of food eaten between meals. Snacks can be made of leftovers or fruit leather, sandwiches or sweets, cheese or chocolate. Historically, snacks were just smaller meals, high in nutrients that provided enough energy to get us through to the next meal. The Blondie cartoon character, Dagwood Bumstead, who loved his layered snacks, was aptly named after the Dagwood sandwich, piled high with meat and cheese.

Today, snacks are synonymous with “junk food” because they are often made from something that once resembled whole food but which has been processed, mashed and extruded into crunchy shapes that no longer resemble food. Then they are mixed with fat, sugar, chemical flavorings and preservatives, topped with salt and sealed in air-tight bags. Marketers conveniently place these snacks next to sugared drinks where we feel compelled to purchase and consume mass quantities of them all. Gone are the days of snacks that provide us with nutrients and energy...or are they?

A 2010 study showed US children consume twice the snacks today than children of the 1970s, snacking 6 times per day. With obesity for children and adults rising at alarming rates, snacking is a likely culprit. Researchers in the Netherlands found snacks from high fat and sugar were associated with excess abdominal fat and the development of fatty liver. The American Association for the Study of Liver Disease found that high-calorie and more frequent meals were associated with increased triglycerides and belly fat.

This is probably not news to you so there is no need to berry you in information. Let’s just relish the fact that you’ve mustard the strength to make wise-snacking decisions. You’ll be amaized at all the healthy snacks you can create in your own kitchen in just a fraction of the thyme it takes to drive to the supermarket or convenience store. “Why I oughta...” Yes you soitenly should. Nyuk Nyuk Nyuk!

Did you hear about the guy who got hit in the head with a can of soda? He was lucky it was a soft drink.
I’ve been told by people who read my newsletters regularly that they can see my sense of humor peeking through. I’ve also been told it’s a little warped. I take that as a compliment. There’s a lot to be said for laughing at TV programs, movies, comics, and even yourself. Research has shown that laughter may be the best medicine yet.

According to the Mayo Clinic, in the short term, laughter stimulates the flow of oxygen and increases endorphins that make you feel good. A good belly laugh can cool down your stress response and help you to feel relaxed. It smooths tension and helps you forget worries and negative feelings.

Over the long haul, regularly laughing or seeing the humor in everyday situations can improve your immune function by releasing neuropeptides that fight stress and illness. Laughter can lower your risk of depression and anxiety and help you to be more fun to be around. You can see how this can increase your chances for more socialization which lowers your risk for heart disease.

Not feeling it? Even if you’re feeling blue, you can fake it ‘til you make it. Just pretending to be happy by smiling or forcing laughter increases endorphins and dopamine and can reduce pain. You may also begin to see improvements in your creativity, memory and energy. And as an added bonus, you will start to look more attractive, even more sexy to others. “BooYah, ski-daddy!”

Next time you reach for a snack, ask yourself why? Are you really hungry? Or could you be bored? Angry? Stressed? Are you craving something or just anything? Can you tell the difference between true hunger and a food craving?

When you experience hunger, authentic hunger, the stomach releases ghrelin (GRELL-in), a hormone that tells the brain it is time to find food. Once you’ve eaten, another hormone, leptin is released to let the body know it has enough to eat. Most cravings are not regulated by ghrelin and leptin and have little to do with hunger or the need for nutrients. Cravings are more of a desire for something, usually an emotional something, which we fill with food. Low levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine can lead to sugar and refined starch cravings which will temporarily help increase serotonin and dopamine. Sugary foods also trigger the pleasure pathways, rewarding you each time you consume them, making them extremely addictive. Research has shown that continuous exposure to sugar is not only a tough habit to break, it is more addictive than cocaine. This is not news to most chocoholics. Ever try taking their chocolate away?

During stress, our bodies produce cortisol which causes the release of sugars for energy, helping us to fight or run from danger (fight or flight). During these times of fighting or running away, our bodies suppress leptin and insulin, increasing hunger. This is a useful response when mustering the energy to face a bear in the woods, but not so useful for sitting on the sofa with the remote and a bag of chips.

Think comfort food, and whose mind didn’t jump to a bowl of macaroni & cheese? Actually, women tend to crave sweets and fats whereas men crave savory foods and salty snacks. Next time you are watching TV, notice the ads for chocolate are all women and the ads for meat are men (or women for men to look at). Research shows men and women both enjoy foods prepared for them by their mothers during childhood, regardless of the type of food. What mother didn’t give her child grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup?

Dietary restrictions can make cravings worse. Consciously removing a food from the diet can just make you think of it more. “I will not eat that cookie, I will not eat that cookie,” is translated by the brain into, “bla bla cookie...bla bla cookie” which is a direct order for your hand to reach for that cookie. Although science is still working out the hunger/craving differences, one thing is for sure. Snacking is something we can learn to do better.
Keep in mind, your goal for wise snacking (and meals) is to increase your intake of fruits, vegetables and whole grains while simultaneously decreasing your intake of salt, sugar, fat and cholesterol. The best way to achieve this goal is to begin with whole, fresh ingredients and prepare your own snacks from scratch. This doesn't have to take a lot of time or effort. All you need is a few good recipes to get you started. Want to be a real wiseguy? Learn more about the recommendations at Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Instead of potato skins, try baking potato wedges. Scrub (leave the skins on for extra fiber) and slice into wedges. Toss with small amount of oil and your favorite spices. Try garlic and rosemary or use fresh lemon or lime instead of oil with cumin and chili powder. Place on baking sheet and bake at 400°F for 30-45 minutes or until crisp. To serve, top with green onion, red bell pepper and a dollop of salsa or unsweetened applesauce.

**Mushroom Bruschetta** Heat a small amount of olive oil in a skillet and stir in mushrooms, green onions, garlic and parsley until mushrooms soften (about 5 min). Mixed fresh diced tomatoes with a teaspoon of balsamic vinegar. Cut slices of 100% whole wheat bread loaves into 3/4” thick pieces and toast in broiler. Top toast with mushroom mixture and sprinkle with tomatoes. Make it easier by using this topping on 100% whole wheat crackers.

**Thai spring rolls with peanut sauce**

**Spring Rolls Ingredients:**
- 7-8 rice spring roll papers
- 1 beet, skin removed and finely grated
- 1/2 yellow and red pepper, seeded, thinly sliced
- 1 cup carrots, thinly sliced
- 1 ripe mango, cubed
- 1 large bunch mint leaves
- 1 large bunch cilantro, cut from stems

**OPTIONAL:** 8 oz extra firm tofu or 1 cup cooked quinoa

**Peanut Sauce Ingredients:**
- 1/2 cup salted natural peanut or almond butter
- 1 1/2 Tbsp soy sauce (GF for gluten free eaters)
- 2-3 Tbsp brown sugar or maple syrup (add to taste)
- 1/2 lime, juiced
- 1/2 tsp chili garlic sauce
- 1/2 tsp fresh grated ginger (optional)
- Hot water to thin

1. Prep veggies and set aside for easy assembly. Then bring 3 cups water to a boil in a saucepan or kettle and set aside to cool slightly for softening rice papers.
2. Prepare peanut sauce by adding all ingredients except water to a mixing bowl and whisking. Add hot water 1 Tbsp at a time and whisk until desired consistency is desired (should be pourable but thick). Set aside.
3. Add hot water to shallow dish and submerge one rice paper 10-20 seconds until just pliable.
4. Transfer to a clean, slightly damp surface and gently smooth out. Fill one at a time.
5. Add 1-2 Tbsp veggie mixture with cilantro and mint (and any other desired fillings). Fold bottom over the filling, then gently roll over once and fold in the side to seal, then roll until completely sealed. Place on a serving plate and top with a room temperature damp towel to keep fresh.
6. Serve with peanut dipping sauce and a confident smile.

**Fruit kabobs**

Skewer slices of strawberry, cantaloupe, pineapple, orange, blueberries and any other fresh fruit. Use a few pieces of star fruit, kiwi, dried figs or dates. Stick pointed end into the rind of watermelon or honeydew or layer on a platter. The more color the better.

Make your own **snack mixes** by combining 100% whole grain cereals with popcorn, dried fruits nuts and spices.

**Go back to basics** with the old standby peanut butter (or other nut butters like almond, pistachio, hazelnut) on apples. Or layer nut butter with banana or dried fruit on 100% whole grain crackers or toast.

Smooth out the trouble spots with a combination of **green smoothies**. Or try this spunky Green Monster:

- 1 cup almond or soy milk, 1 cup fresh parsley, 1 Tbsp chia or flax seeds, 1 pear or banana, 1 tsp lemon juice, 2 Tbsp nut butter, 2-3 ice cubes or frozen blueberries. Blend until smooth. Hang carrot curls and wax fangs off the glass and top with two small “eyeballs” of whipped cream.

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**Appetizers**

**Mushroom Bruschetta**

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6. Serve with peanut dipping sauce and a confident smile.
What’s a “do” without dip? Whether it’s snacking after school or munching through Monday Night Football, dips can be healthy as well as delicious. Flip your dips from flops to fabulous with these nourishing noshes.

3 Color Hummus starts with garbanzo beans and spices. Split the hummus in 3. Keep one plain and create two more with either sundried tomatoes and red pepper or spinach and cilantro. Serve with 100% whole wheat tortilla or pita and cut vegetables.

Corn & Black Bean Salsa Mix 2 cans drained corn with 2 cans drained black beans. Add chopped tomatoes, onion, cilantro, 4 jalapeno peppers, 1/4 cup lime juice and salt to taste. Make your own tortilla chips with 100% wheat tortillas cut into chip size. Spray with cooking spray and sprinkle with chili powder and cumin. Bake at 350°F for about 6 mins. Then flip and bake 6 min more until crisp.

Tzatziki Dip is great for dipping with raw or grilled veggies. 1/2 cucumber, 2 cups Greek yogurt, 4 cloves garlic, 1/3 cup chopped fresh dill, juice from 1/2 a lemon and salt & pepper to taste. Make this a day ahead and it’s even better.

Guacamole Easiest dip ever. 3 mashed avocados, juice from 1 lime, 1/2 cup diced onion, 3 Tbsp or more fresh cilantro, 2 diced tomatoes, 1 tsp garlic and a pinch of ground cayenne pepper.

Thai Dipping Sauce Put 2 Tsp cornstarch, 3/4 cup water, 1/3 cup rice vinegar, 1/4 cup brown sugar, 1 1/2 cup soy sauce, 1 Tbsp fresh ginger and 2 cloves garlic in saucepan. Add 1/2 tsp crushed red pepper. Bring to boil until thickens. Cool and dip.

Goblin’s Pate
3/4 cup raw sunflower seeds
3/4 cup raw almonds
3 medium carrots, shredded
1 cup chopped sweet onion
2 slices whole wheat bread, cut in cubes
1/2 cup fresh lemon juice
3 tablespoons low sodium soy sauce
3 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped
1/2 to 1 chile, finely minced
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon paprika
Garnish with 1 small cucumber for the stem, 1/3 bunch watercress & some plastic spiders
1. Cover nuts and seeds in water and soak 10-12 hours. Rinse and remove floating skins.
2. Put soaked nuts and seeds in food processor. Add the carrots, onion, bread cubes, lemon juice, soy sauce, garlic, chile, salt, and paprika. Process until it reaches the consistency of paté.
3. Spoon the mixture onto a plate and form the shape of a pumpkin with the hands. Cut the cucumber in half and place it in the center to form the stem. Form indentations to imitate the corrugations of pumpkins and decorate with strips of thinly cut cucumber.

Arrange the watercress around the base and toss a few plastic or licorice spiders around the plate. Serve with 100% whole wheat crackers or bread cut into fingers and some cut veggies like red pepper, celery and jicama.

Pumpkin Pie Squares
Mix 2 cups graham cracker crumbs (regular or gluten free) with 1/4 cup melted coconut oil and 2 Tbsp syrup. Press firmly into 8” square pan lined with parchment paper. Bake at 350°F for 10 minutes. Whisk together arrow root powder and syrup until smooth. Add remaining filling ingredients:

1 (14-oz) can pumpkin puree
1 cup sugar
1/4 cup maple syrup
1/4 cup coconut milk
1 1/2 Tbsp arrow root
2 Tbsp almond milk
2 tsp vanilla
1 1/2 tsp cinnamon
1/4 tsp each nutmeg and ginger
Pinch of cloves and salt
Blend until smooth. Pour onto hot crust. Bake at 350°F for 41-43 minutes. Cool on rack 60 minutes then set in fridge overnight. Slice into squares with dollop of whipped cream with a dusting of cinnamon and chopped pecans.

Spiced nuts
Savory Put 2 Tbsp oil in a skillet. Add 1/2 tsp each cumin, coriander and garlic powder, 1/4 tsp each chili powder, ground ginger and cinnamon. Cook on low heat 2 minutes and remove from heat. Stir in 2/3 cup each cashews and pecans and 1 1/2 cup almonds. Coat evenly. Spread on baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake at 300°F for 15 minutes or until golden.

Sweet Briefly dunk 1 cup whole nuts of choice in water with 1 Tbsp oil added, remove and drain. Mix together 1 cup sugar, 1 tsp each salt, ginger, cloves and 2 Tbsp cinnamon. Coat moistened nuts in spices. Bake at 300°F for 15 minutes. For variations, click on the links.
Snacking is not only fun, delicious and a big part of our social structure, but it can also be dangerously unhealthy. Start switching out unhealthy high sugar, salt and fat snacks with tasty, nutritious & healthy appetizers and dips. Start paying attention to why you’re seeking out snack foods. Try Wise-Snacking by making healthy snack foods more available and a little more fun!

Kids (and adults) can still enjoy fun treats for Halloween without all the sugar and fat. Try making food fun, instead of sweet. These samples are from 64 Non-Candy Halloween Snack Ideas.

For instance, make “Boo’nana pops” by dipping 1/4-slice banana in white chocolate. Add stick and 2 mini chocolate pieces for eyes. Freeze.

Build a spider made of 6 toothpick legs with black olives or blueberries stuck into a plum body. Can’t get enough spiders? Spread nut butter on one 100% whole grain cracker. Break 6 100% whole wheat pretzel sticks in half or use thin slices of carrot or red pepper for legs. Stick into nut butter so “legs” are hanging off the cracker. Top with another cracker and add two drops of nut butter “glue” to stick eyes of raisins or chocolate pieces.

Stick celery stalks into the center of clementine oranges to make fruit “pumpkins.”

Find food-safe clear gloves. Put candy corn “nails” in finger tips. Fill with air-popped popcorn. Close wrist with orange or black ribbon and slide on a plastic spider ring for effect.

Create “candy corn” parfaits by layering pineapple chunks and Mandarin orange pieces in a clear glass. Top with a small amount of whipped cream.

Build a skeleton out of mixed veggies: cucumber backbone, red pepper ribs, celery legs and broccoli hands and feet. The head is a bowl of dip with leafy lettuce hair. After all, you are what you eat.

Gorp is a snack much like a trail mix made with fruit, nuts, and other ingredients. Some believe it refers to the word “gorp” which means “to eat greedily.” Others say it could be an acronym for Good Old Raisins and Peanuts. Either way, it’s easy to make your own for after school snacks or weekend hiking outings. Here are a few suggestions.

**Gorp:** combine in a bowl or bag:
- 1/2 ounce whole shelled, unpeeled almonds
- 1/4 ounce unsalted, dry-roasted peanuts
- 1/4 ounce dried cranberries or other dried fruit
- 1 Tbsp chopped, pitted dates
- 1 1/2 tsp chocolate chips

**Generic Trail Mix**

**Nuts** Go for raw or dry-roasted, unsweetened, unsalted varieties of your favorite nut

**Seeds** Try pumpkin, sunflower, sesame or hemp

**Dried fruits** Dried apples, cherries, apricots, raisins, figs, pineapple or dates are great. Go easy, the sugar is concentrated and adds up in a hurry

**Grains** Use 100% whole grains like shredded wheat, bran flakes, oat cereals, whole wheat crackers, air-popped popcorn, 100% whole wheat pretzels

**Chocolate** is optional like chocolate covered coffee beans, M&Ms or chocolate pieces. Choose dark chocolate for extra antioxidants

**Savory spices** Season your mix with sea salt, curry, ginger, cayenne pepper, onion or garlic powders

**Others** Try adding unsweetened coconut, dried ginger, wasabi or dried seaweed

Just add your favorite grains to these fruit and nut combinations:

**Simple:** Almonds, dried cherries, dark chocolate, sea salt, cinnamon

**Tropical:** cashews, brazil nuts, dried mango, coconut flakes, banana chips

**Exotic:** Peanuts, raisins, puffed rice, pretzels, curry and chili powders

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**Wise-Snacking humor. Did you hear about…**

the girl who quit her job at the doughnut factory because she was fed up with the hole business?

Or the woman’s company that distributes gift-boxed cashews and the deliver guy that drives her nuts?

Punoftheday.com
Upcoming Events

October
8  Pre-CHIP health screening, 6:30 to 8:30 am, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Coquille, by appointment only (see below)
15  Healing Food, food demo and tasting, CHEC building, Coos Bay, 12 to 2 pm (see right)
17  Say NO to Disease, Go Garden Go Green, Southwestern Community College, Brookings (see below)
18  LEAP alumni potluck, Bandon Library, 12:30 to 2:30
28  Scary Foods, Coos Bay Library, 525 Anderson, 7 to 8:30 pm. Free (see below)
30  Scary Foods, Chetco Activity Center, 550 Chetco Lane, Brookings, 10 am to noon (see below)

November Save the Date
5  CHIP post health screen 6:30 to 8:30 am
12  Northwest Health & Nutrition Conference (see below)
13 & 14  Northwest VegFest (see below)
15  CHIP commencement, Coquille Seventh-day Adventist Church
20  The Sweet Seduction of Chocolate, Chetco Activity Center
22  LEAP alumni potluck, Bandon Library, 12:30 to 2:30

Healing Food cooking demo
Community Health Education Center
3950 Sherman Ave, Coos Bay
12 to 2 pm. Free. To register: www.bayareahospital.org/calendar_events.aspx or call 541-269-8076

To view archived issues of Wellness Ink, go to http://extension.oregonstate.edu/coos/coos-county-extension-accessibility

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