How to Keep Hunger Pangs at Bay at Night!!

Shutting down for the day, but your appetite has hit the reboot button leaving you guilty of raiding the fridge for leftovers or heading to bed with a jar of namkeen? Try a healthy midnight snack! There are several reasons why you may find yourself craving a midnight snack. Ironically, many of them have nothing to do with actual hunger. It could be because you haven’t had enough sleep. Lack of sleep impacts the body’s hormonal balance, which in turn triggers hunger pangs. Stress & boredom are two other factors that can cause you to feel peckish at night. The circadian system- causes late night cravings for sweet, starchy & salty foods. Either way, increased hunger at night is one of the leading causes of weight gain, mostly because people choose the wrong kinds of food to snack on in the wee hours.

Midnight hunger pangs are the most difficult to overcome, when you are on a diet. When you have been eating healthy the entire day & then suddenly feel like eating something fulfilling in the night, what do you do? It’s imperative that you opt for healthy midnight snacks, so that all your sacrifice does not go waste.
There are snacks which you can eat at night, without having to compromise on your diet because the worst part about trying to lose weight is feeling hungry. Midnight snacks need not be high on calories or especially fattening for you. You customize your midnight snack, by including more fiber-dense foods, which tend to be more filling & add a bit of fat & carbohydrates to the mix to improve the taste. However, be sure to control the portions, or you will end up negating all your efforts. Keep a calorie count of your midnight snacks & try to minimize it by opting for nutrient rich foods, instead of those that are too greasy, oily or sugary.

The key to feeling full is not eating large portions, but rather, choosing foods that contain nutrients which aid satiety. Foods high in protein, fiber & good fats tend to keep your hunger at bay, which is what you want to aim for when trying to lose weight or maintain your weight.

Having a small, planned snack in the evenings is not such a bad thing – it can actually help you sleep better. Choosing the right snack is key to satisfying your hunger without giving you sleep-disturbing indigestion or morning bloat & regret. Remember to munch on them mindfully & consuming them at least an hour before bedtime to prevent any stomach issues.

People snack for two reasons – they are actually hungry or it’s a habit they can’t seem to shake. To handle both these issues, adopt these tips to help change your unhealthy late-night snacking ritual. The usual rule is that you should not be eating anything after 8 PM if you want to stay healthy & keep obesity at bay. The fact is, people eat at night for a variety of reasons that often have little to do with hunger, from satisfying cravings to coping with boredom or stress. The after-dinner snacks often consist of large portions of high-calorie foods (like chips, cookies, candy), eaten while sitting in front of the television or computer. Besides, those unnecessary extra calories, eating too close to bedtime can cause indigestion & sleeping problems.

There is nothing wrong with eating a light, healthy snack after dinner as long as you plan for it as part of your daily calories. To keep you away from overeating, pay attention to your food while eating, avoiding eating in front of the television or computer & choose a portion-controlled snack.
Can’t Sleep? Attempt these Quick Tips

Have a Glass of Water

Individuals mistake hunger for thirst. Instead of reaching for food, try drinking a glass of water or a warm cup of green/herbal tea. If you still feel hungry, go for that healthy midnight snack.

Avoid Large Meals Before Bedtime

Even though small snacks can fit into a nightly routine, avoid heavy dinners & meals right before you lay down. Try to consume a larger meal at least 2-3 hours prior to rest.

Limit Caffeine

Too much caffeine in the afternoon or evening may interfere & disrupt precious sleep cycles. Limit caffeine consumption after morning hours to help encourage a more restful night.

Stay Away from too Much Protein

Although protein is an integral diet component, too much before bedtime may lead to uncomfortable digestion.
Ways to Avoid Midnight Snacking

The best way to avoid late-night snacking is to eat a number of small meals throughout the day. As satisfying your appetite is a matter of timing. Try to eat every 3 to 4 hours, just in time to keep your blood sugar levels stable. Eat during the day & have a well balanced dinner that includes a salad, a whole-grain, lean protein, a vegetable & maybe a piece of fruit for dessert.

A good workout or a long walk near the end of the day also might help you to avoid midnight snacking habits. Some midnight snacking is based purely on boredom or stress from the day, as you are stressed & you are trying to calm yourself down with food. One should also keep in mind that there is a difference between midnight snacking & eating a late dinner. If you need to eat a late dinner due to your schedule, as long as you don’t eat excess calories, you should be fine & able to maintain a healthy weight.

Ideas for Healthy Midnight Snacks

So what happens if you eat a healthy dinner but are still hungry right before bedtime? There are healthy midnight snacks that you can have without breaking the calorie bank. Healthy midnight snacks include a piece of fruit, a bowl of berries, a cup of popcorn, low-fat yogurt or cereal with skim milk, etc. Be sure to snack in small portions & eat snacks with both carbohydrates & proteins. We should not keep the kinds of foods in our house that would lead to unhealthy snacking & tempt you like cookies & ice creams.

So if you do feel the need to munch on something before bed, Opt for these healthy snacks & snack recipes that are rich in sleep-inducing nutrients & these yummy midnight snacks will help you stay on your diet schedule, without having to starve yourself.
Fruits are one of the best things you can snack on when you get your late-night cravings and hunger pangs. Aside from their high nutritional value, they are also quick to eat and require minimal preparation - just cut and peel them and they’re ready to eat. If you have been looking for low calorie and no fuss munchies, then make yourself a fruit salad topped with or without skimmed cream. Bananas are rich in potassium, which prevent cramps, and can be eaten as it is, spread with peanut butter, or even dipped in dark chocolate. Fresh apples are great with a few tablespoons of peanut butter, almond butter, or any other nut butter or can be eaten raw, this snack tastes best when the apple is chilled and crisp. Cantaloupes, like most other fruits, contain a lot of water which means you get lots of beta-carotene without having to worry about calories. You can also try raspberries with yogurt and few drops of honey or strawberries with cream, which are also a great source of fiber. Also, frozen fruits are tasty and healthy snacks that you can reach for at night without feeling guilty. If you’re not up for just plain fruit, you can toss them in the blender with some yogurt and make a low-fat smoothie instead.

To satisfy your sweet tooth, you can also slice up some bananas, sprinkle them with cinnamon and coconut shavings, and bake them or let them sit in the freezer until your next hunger pang hit you late at night.

Vegetables are high in nutrients, water content, and antioxidant levels which make them very effective in preventing dehydration. Salad sticks are clever and healthy snacks for people who are up till late at night. Sticks of cucumber, celery, radishes, broccoli, zucchini, carrots and beetroots are light and do not impinge on your health while they fill your stomach just as well. Cut up all these vegetables into sticks, and keep some good hung curd or light mayonnaise and sprinkle some pepper in it & use it as a side dip or use dips like hummus & salsa. Try munching on some crunchy baby carrots with a side dip of nonfat Greek yogurt, garlic, salt and pepper. Another tasty snack would be sliced tomatoes sprinkled with feta cheese or cottage cheese and a little seasoning in it, which is a light and refreshing snack and is light on your stomach.
Breakfast Cereals

One bowl of whole grain cereal with low fat milk or a bowl of oatmeal, is perhaps the healthiest way to keep midnight cravings at bay. Whole grain cereals are packed with fiber, so it will fill you up in no time to save you from reaching out to the nearest pack of potato crisps. They are made up of complex carbohydrates, and are easier to digest. Moreover, the milk will provide you with proteins which is always great when you’re trying to loose weight. Wheat flakes, muesli, bran flakes, and rolled oats, among others, are rich in fiber and protein and are great with yogurt or skimmed milk along with teaspoon of honey. You can even add some blueberries, strawberries or any other fruit and nuts to the mix which can do wonders for your body. Oats are an absolutely fat less food, we can even make namkeen oats poha by substituting the regular rice poha with roasted oats.

Plain Popcorn

This snack is a great way to stay in shape and is also filling. Who wouldn’t like to munch on crispy pop corns when you are up till late at night while working or studying. But lesser the fat and salt, healthier the popcorn is. Popcorn is a complex carbohydrate, so it contains serotonin, which is a hormone that helps you relax. It’s great if you want an evening snack and the fiber in it will help satisfy your hunger and ward off cravings. Home made popcorn makes a great midnight snack as long as you eat the plain kind and stay away from those with too much salt, flavored powder, butter and cheese. Instead, add a tsp of olive oil & sprinkle some red chili powder, black pepper or cinnamon for a unique flavor. Adding a cayenne pepper, is another great way of enjoying your popcorn without feeling guilty of gaining weight. Just make sure your popcorn is of the whole grain variety so it’s healthier for you.

Sprout Bhel

Keep your fridge always stocked with sprouts. All you have to then do is to add some chopped tomatoes, onions, salt and pepper, your instant sprout bhel is ready to snack on.
Another two super foods that you must always keep in your fridge are black chickpeas and white chickpeas. Add chopped tomatoes, onions, a few lemon drops, salt and pepper powder to these chanas for a quick power snack.

Rich in protein and fats that can keep you full, eggs are another guilt-free food item you can snack on to battle your midnight cravings. Not only are they quick and easy to prepare, but they are also very diverse when it comes to how you can cook and serve them. Eggs are an essential diet foods, as they are one of the few sources of Vitamin D.

One whole hard boiled egg is packed with good fat and proteins, and is one of the more healthier ways to fight hunger pangs at night. Make sure you eat it with the yolk, as it is the most nutrient-dense part of the egg. Another idea is to put slices of hard-boiled eggs on crackers and sprinkle with salt and pepper. One more option is to cook two egg whites and serve them on a slice of whole wheat toast. The protein from the eggs and the carbohydrates from the bread will give you enough energy while still being light enough for a midnight snack.

Omelettes are a popular choice and can be mixed with onion, peppers, mushrooms, and cheese to make them more flavorful. You can even add in a few extra egg whites to get more protein.
Cottage Cheese

Cottage cheese or paneer is a healthy source of protein, more so for vegetarians who have limited options of protein-rich food. Not only is cottage cheese filling, but it’s also packed with high levels of casein and whey protein which keep you full and at the same time work to build and repair your muscle tissues. Snacking on this will really help your body regenerate itself as you enjoy a good night’s sleep. Both Tofu and Paneer sticks are a wise snacking option. One can make paneer/tofu rolls or sandwich for evening snacks which gives energy and keeps hunger pangs at bay. If you want something extra tasty, you can also toss in a variety of berries and some walnuts, almonds, or any other kinds of nuts you prefer or pair cottage cheese/tofu with pear, peach or pineapple slices for a lightly sweetened, fresh midnight snack. It also helps you feel full, although it could be a little heavy on the stomach to process if taken late at night.

Dairy contains proteins, calcium and good fat which is important for fighting cholesterol in the body. Aside from satisfying your late-night cravings, a nice glass of warm milk is a great way of satiating hunger and can also help you sleep better because of its tryptophan content which stimulates serotonin production in the body and induces sleep and meets your body’s nutritional demands.

You can even add vanilla-flavored protein powder to a cup of skimmed milk and blend the mixture with ice to make a healthy milkshake or by drinking a glass of chocolate milk. You can have it during breakfast or before your bedtime as it ensures a good night’s sleep. You can whip a cool and refreshing yoghurt smoothie made with fresh fruits and can also substitute yoghurt with low fat milk, it’s nourishing and filling at the same time. A glass of milkshake or smoothie makes a perfect healthy snack for you at anytime of the day.
Greek Yogurt

Greek yogurt is a great food to include in your diet, as a single serving of yogurt contains enough calcium and vitamin D. It is also packed with protein and has low sugar content, but can still leave you feeling full, without adding unnecessarily to the calorie count. Stick to flavors that are not loaded with added sugar & having plain yogurt is the best. A bowl of yogurt after dinner, is advisable to improve digestion & it prevents heart burn by quickening the metabolizing process of food. It also makes for a great midnight snack, if you add fresh fruit, a handful of berries, walnuts, flax seeds, chia seeds and a drizzle of honey if necessary for that added boost of flavor.

Water

One should not forget to drink water as Dehydration is one of the biggest reasons we feel hungry, you may actually just be mistaking your thirst for hunger. Drink a glass of water whenever you feel hungry in the middle of the night, and your stomach will most likely settle down. You can also drink a glass right before bed to avoid waking up in the middle of the night hungry. If plain water won’t cut it for you, try squeezing some lime or adding a slice of lemon in your glass for added health benefits. A slice of cucumber will also be good for your skin. Your body needs to stay hydrated 24/7, round the year. Drinking a glass of water every half an hour or one hour would keep your hunger in check for a longer duration. We should drink 8-10 glasses of water per day.

Herbal Tea

Nothing can beat the aroma of a freshly brewed cup of hot tea in the late night hours. But excess caffeine can take a toll on your body. A refreshing green tea is not only a healthier alternative, but it will also boost your metabolism and flush out the toxins from your system. Jasmine and Chamomile Tea is an ideal midnight snack for people who have insomnia and are not able to eat. Brew a bag full in hot water and you will be able to sleep well.
Dried fruits are another great late-night snack option. The protein, fiber, and fat in nuts help you feel full for longer hours. Aside from having a high antioxidant and fiber content, they can also help stimulate your secretion of serotonin which leaves you feeling full and giving you a good night’s sleep. Nut eaters may have a lower incidence of diabetes when compared to those who rarely eat nuts. Apricots, figs, prunes, and dates are rich in various nutrients and will do wonders for your health, eating a handful of unsalted raw almonds before going to bed, is a great way of treating yourself to a healthy midnight snack. If you have got a sweet craving, then a handful of nuts would work wonders for your taste buds. However, avoid consuming only one variety of nuts, instead, keep handy a jar of mixed variety of nuts such as almonds, cashew nuts, apricots, figs, walnuts, peanuts, pistachios and raisins, as they are good to indulge in as a midnight snack. Pistachios are a great choice as they have a much lower salt content than most processed snacks. Almonds are another good alternative as they are densely packed with nutrients and they are an excellent way to get your fix of fiber, protein, magnesium, and vitamin E. Pumpkin seeds or Flax seeds on the other hand, are a good source of vitamin B, protein, zinc, iron, and magnesium, it keeps you de-stressed and help you unwind at night no matter how heavy your workload may be.
**Nut Butters**

Nut butters make a very satisfying treat because they have a lot of healthy, nutritious ingredients but still taste like a great dessert. All natural nut butter like almond butter or peanut butter makes a great spread, especially on top of a whole grain bread. You can even use it as an ingredient for a homemade milkshake if you want something a bit different. The key is watching your portion size & one should eat it in moderation. You don’t have to eat a lot of these nutrient dense snacks to ease your late night hunger.

**Trail Mix and Granola Bars**

A handful of nuts, seeds, and dried fruits make a very healthy and filling snack. You can find trail mix at almost any grocery store, but you can just as easily make it on your own as well and add in any seeds you like – chia seeds, hemp seeds or flax seeds, for even more nutritional boost. This treat contains high levels of good fats and oils, and is also rich in antioxidants that do wonders for your body and skin. If you want something more compact, a granola bar is also a good and healthy option, it is a nutritious way to quiet your late night hunger pangs.
Toast up a slice of whole grain bread and slice or smear on fresh avocado. Sprinkle with a little salt and pepper if desired.

Preheat oven 300 degrees Fahrenheit. Toss 2 cups of pumpkin seeds, 1 cup almonds, ⅛ cup raw sunflower seeds and 5–6 tbsp maple syrup/honey in a large bowl until everything is evenly coated. Spread the nuts and seeds out in an even, single layer in a baking tray. Season with salt to taste. Bake the nuts for about 20 minutes or until golden, stirring several times with a spatula. Remove from the oven and cool. Once the nuts have cooled, add 1 cup dried cherries or cranberries, toss to combine. Store the mix in an airtight container at room temperature.

Warm 1 cup of low fat or skim milk until it is a little hotter than you would comfortably drink, and stir in 1–2 tsp of honey, depending on your sweetness preference. Sprinkle a pinch of ground nutmeg. Drink it about 30 minutes before you go to bed.

In a mixer, combine 1 cup chickpeas (cooked and drained), 3–4 cloves garlic, 2 tbsp tahini (sesame seed paste), 2 tbsp fresh lemon juice, 2 tbsp olive oil, 1 tsp jeera (cumin) powder, ¼ tsp paprika, salt to taste, combine all the ingredients and puree until smooth and creamy. Transfer it into a bowl and serve with carrot and cucumber sticks or any other raw/steamed vegetables of your choice.

Toast 1 slice of multigrain bread lightly on a pan. In a bowl mix ½ cup of crumbled paneer (1 scrambled egg can also be used instead of paneer) with ¼ chopped onion & tomato, add salt & pepper to taste. Spread the topping over the toasted bread and your healthy snack is ready to eat.

Vegetable Sticks with Hummus

In a mixer, combine 1 cup chickpeas (cooked and drained), 3–4 cloves garlic, 2 tbsp tahini (sesame seed paste), 2 tbsp fresh lemon juice, 2 tbsp olive oil, 1 tsp jeera (cumin) powder, ¼ tsp paprika, salt to taste, combine all the ingredients and puree until smooth and creamy. Transfer it into a bowl and serve with carrot and cucumber sticks or any other raw/steamed vegetables of your choice.

Almond Trail Mix

Toast & Avocado
The Good & the Bad of Late Night Snacking

We have all heard it before- “It’s not good to eat after 7 PM” or “Snacking at night will make you gain weight”. While there is some truth to the idea that snacking after dinner can be harmful to your waistline, if done correctly and under the right circumstances, having an evening snack can be beneficial at times. Here are the good and the bad of late-night snacking habits to see if what you are munching after dinner is helpful or harmful.

If You are a Night Owl:
Dining before 7 PM and perhaps having a snack around 8-9 PM is no big deal if you are up and active until later in the evening – if you are studying, working, doing laundry, housework or anything where you are mentally or physically active, then your evening snack will be providing you energy to do these tasks and will most likely be burned off in the later hours you are awake.

Controlling Calories:
If you are keeping the total calories of your snack between 100–200 calories, then a snack can be beneficial without breaking your calorie bank.

Eating Whole Foods:
Having fresh fruit or vegetables, yogurt, cottage cheese, oatmeal, hummus, etc. will ensure you are having a snack that will have good nutritional content and be “worth” the calories you are consuming.

Practice Portioning:
If you are sticking to correct serving sizes and putting your portion on a plate, then you will be mentally satisfied as well as physically satisfied with the amount chosen.

Eating Mindlessly
If you are munching while watching TV, chances are you are not paying attention to portion sizes and could be downing more empty calories than planned.

Eating Right Out of the Bag/Box
Grabbing handful of snacks out of the bag/box they came in can lead you eating more than you think because you do not have a visual on exactly how much you have already consumed.

Munching on High Sugar/High Fat Snacks
Sweet and salty - crunchy snacks seem to be a go to late night snack, mostly because of convenience and their “comforting” effects; however, these are usually very high in calories, fat and sugar, not to mention how highly processed these types of goodies are.

Going to Bed Early
If you are eating dinner, then soon after having a snack while dozing off in bed, the excess calories you are consuming are not going to be burned as efficiently as if you were eating earlier in the day.
Thus, One should always snack smartly, if you want your late-night nibble to benefit you nutritionally instead of hurting your waistline. So, whatever kind of snack you crave in the evenings—tart, chewy, crunchy, salty, sweet, creamy, or warm—there’s a perfect option for you that won’t keep you up all night or feeling guilty of those unwanted empty calories. Happy Snacking!

You don’t have to eat less. You just have to eat right.
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