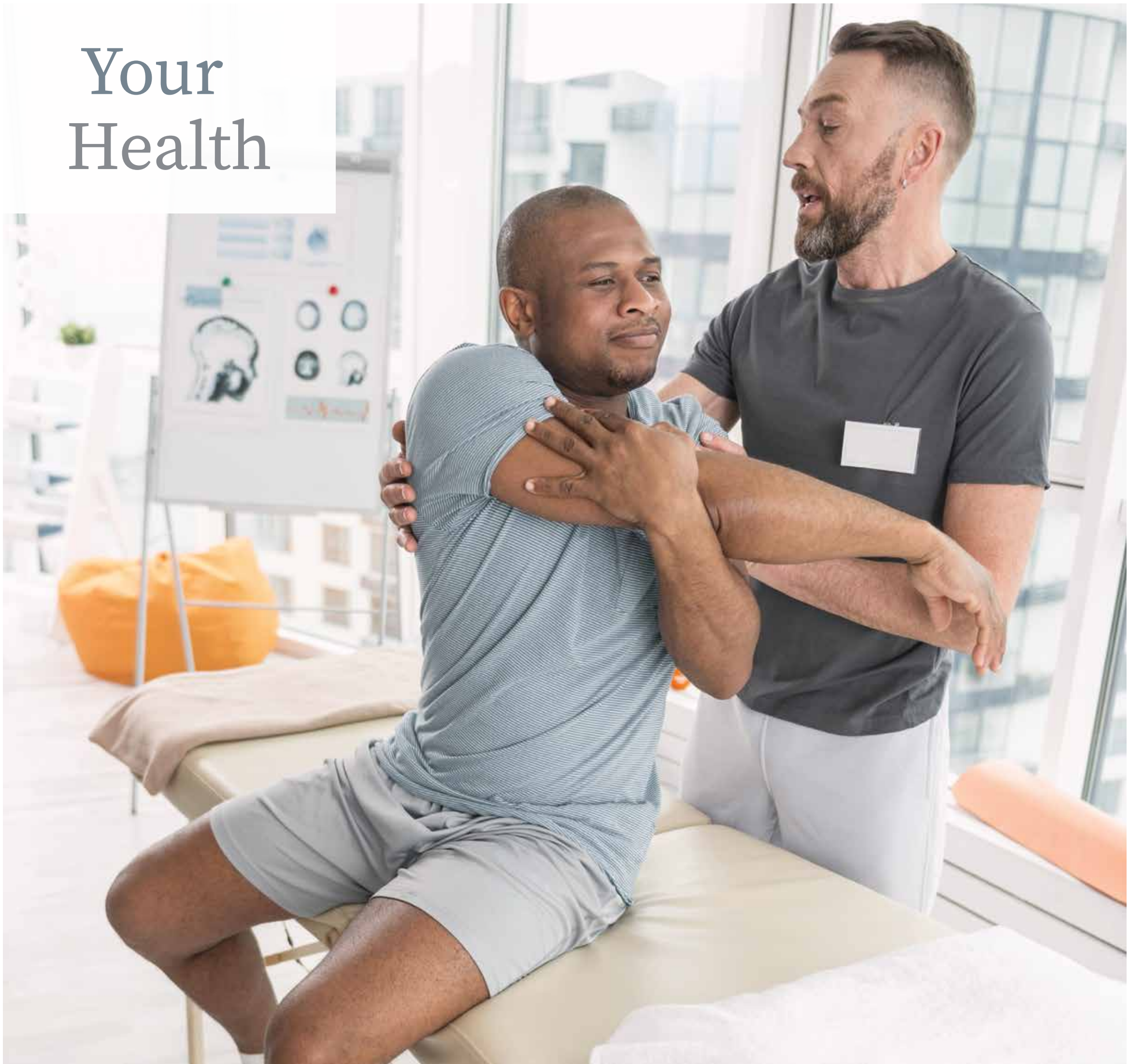


Your Health



Setting Health Goals

It's never been easier to use technology to help set new fitness goals.

Thanks to innovations ranging from meal-planning apps to fitness trackers, we now have unprecedented access to tools that help monitor our progress and improvement. Here's how to leverage technology to achieve your objectives, whether that means increasing activity, losing weight or improving your mental and emotional health.

TRACKERS AND SMART WATCHES

The tools you'll see in action most often are wearable devices like smart watches and fitness trackers. They provide a range of monitoring capabilities, as well as key tracking metrics such as steps taken, heart rate, calories burned and sleep patterns. Advanced models even measure stress, oxygen levels and other vital indicators.

You can establish daily targets, such as burning a specific number of calories or walking 10,000 steps. Many of these devices also offer reminders for inactivity that serve as encouragement to stay engaged. Data collected will shed new light on your overall health and habits while empowering you to make better health decisions.

NUTRITION AND MEAL PLANNING

A balanced diet is fundamental to achieving any health

goal, whether it involves bulking up, weight loss or overall well-being. Nutrition and meal-planning applications like MyFitnessPal, Noom or Lose It! allow users to log meals, track macronutrient distribution and monitor calorie intake. Many of these platforms provide personalized meal plans and grocery lists tailored to individual dietary

preferences.

Some apps provide real-time feedback to promote better food choices and adherence to nutritional plans. Some even enable users to search extensive databases or scan barcodes for precise food information, which helps simplify the task of tracking dietary intake. Try integrating these technological resources

into your routine. You'll set a new path toward health.

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Need help managing anxiety, stress or other mental health challenges? Options like Headspace, Calm and Talkspace provide therapy sessions, guided meditation and mindfulness resources. Many fitness

and wellness apps feature integrated communities and goal-setting functionalities, which allow users to connect with others who share similar challenges and goals. For instance, Strava enables users to track their workouts while encouraging interaction with others to promote healthy competition and a sense of community.



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Focus on Gut Health

The gut serves a crucial role in facilitating digestion and nutrient absorption.

Recent studies have shown that gut health directly affects aspects of our health far beyond that, including immune function and emotional health. That's why it's so important to establish a balanced diet that incorporates probiotics. You enhance your digestive health and strengthen your body's defenses against illness.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

A healthy gastrointestinal tract, commonly known as the gut, goes beyond mere digestion. The National Institutes of Health reports that balanced gut bacteria can lower the risk of conditions such as diabetes, psoriatic arthritis and inflammatory bowel disease. This often-overlooked part of our bodies plays a significant role in fortifying primary defense mechanisms.

The GI tract is a sophisticated system dedicated to the digestion of food and absorption of nutrients. But its primary functions include maintaining a diverse microbiome.

The gut efficiently breaks down food into vital nutrients that nourish the body, and these nutrients are subsequently absorbed into the bloodstream through the gut



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lining. The tract is home to trillions of microorganisms, collectively referred to as the gut microbiome.

They assist in digestion and vitamin synthesis and affect mood. Each individual has more than 200 distinct species of bacteria, viruses, and fungi within their digestive system, and many are essential for optimal health.

TIPS FOR HEALTH

To promote a healthy gut, stick to a diet that includes a variety of vegetables, fruits, lean proteins and whole grains. This diversity supports a robust microbiome and a strong immune system. Incorporating fiber-rich foods such as oats, broccoli and beans can nourish beneficial gut bacteria while also aiding in

regular bowel movements. Probiotics are live bacteria and yeasts found in yogurt, and fermented foods like sauerkraut, and they play a critical role in maintaining a balanced microbiome. Foods rich in prebiotics such as garlic, asparagus and onions also support gut health.

Hydration is also crucial. So is limiting excessive sugar and

processed foods, since they can disrupt the delicate balance of bacteria. Chronic stress has been shown to adversely affect gut health, so engage in relaxation techniques such as yoga and meditation. Antibiotic use may also negatively affect gut health. Regular physical activity supports gut motility and contributes to a healthy microbiome.

Establish a Morning Routine

Creating and sticking to a healthy morning routine unlocks many health benefits, ranging from heightened productivity to improved overall well-being.

Exercise is part of it, along with good nutrition, hydration and mindfulness practices. Improve your physical and mental health by beginning every day the right way.

WHY CREATE A ROUTINE?

A well-structured morning routine can give your day vitality and purpose. Physical activity promotes cardiovascular health, stimulates our metabolism and benefits overall physical wellness. Mindfulness practices like yoga, journaling or meditation help with anxiety, stress and depression. Establishing a consistent morning ritual can also aid in goal achievement and time management.

INSIDE THE RESEARCH

Studies by leading psychologists have shown that positive morning habits like exercise and a balanced diet help elevate energy levels throughout the day. Factors such as age, genetics and happiness levels play a role in overall energy, but researchers say as much



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as 60 percent of alertness can be influenced by what happens after we wake up, from the immediate environment to being active to the choices we make about breakfast.

WHAT TO DO

Begin the day with some sort of physical activity, whether that means a quick workout or a brisk walk. Exercise releases endorphins,

which can enhance your mood and boost energy levels. Just be sure to get a good night's sleep. Hydrate before, during and after your routine. A glass of water first thing in the morning doesn't just replenish lost fluids. It jumpstarts your metabolism.

Select activities, exercises and healthy foods that resonate with you. Spend a few minutes setting daily goals.

You'll establish priorities while maintaining a focus on what matters most. A balanced breakfast of whole grains, lean proteins and fruits will provide sustained energy throughout the day. Don't forget mindfulness practices like deep breathing exercises or meditation. They help alleviate stress while fostering a sense of mental clarity.

GETTING STARTED

Establish a consistent wake-up time to anchor your day. As with any new goal, commit to taking small, achievable first steps. Gradually incorporate new things as you become more comfortable. Any routine should be adaptable to your evolving needs and goals. Periodically assess and adjust your process as needed.

Get Regular Wellness Checks

Doctor's visits aren't just for bouts of illness or an injury. Regular wellness checks, or physicals, are a vital component in maintaining overall health.

Seek immediate care if you are hurt or sick, but don't overlook these routine check-ups. Schedule at least one appointment every year, even if you feel fine. Most insurance plans cover them; well visits are available at no cost through Medicare. Your health could depend on it.

EARLY DETECTION AND PREVENTION

Wellness checks contribute to early detection and prevention of illnesses. During these appointments, healthcare providers conduct tests to get a comprehensive snapshot of your well-being. The visit may include evaluations of personal and family medical history, physical examinations, routine screenings for colorectal cancer or a mammogram, and individual mental health assessments. Doctors identify potential issues, preferably at an early stage, and then recommend certain diet and physical changes, prescribe medicine or both. These results set a critical baseline. Your health indicators will be regularly monitored to reduce the risk



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of developing future health complications.

PROMOTING WELL-BEING

Besides preventing and treating illnesses, well visits promote overall wellness. Your healthcare provider will discuss healthy lifestyle choices during your visit, including stress management, exercise, nutrition and mental

health. These routine appointments may include vital vaccinations and immunizations that safeguard you and your communities against preventable diseases. You'll get guidance on weight management, prevention strategies, smoking cessation, or other personalized advice. Together, you can create a personalized plan that leads to healthier habits and a bet-

ter quality of life.

OPEN AND HONEST DISCUSSIONS

It's important to establish an open and honest relationship with your healthcare provider during these routine well visits. This helps them better understand your medical history, lifestyle and unique health requirements. Doctors can then provide

tailored health recommendations suited to your individual circumstances.

Eventually, these discussions will include scheduling age-appropriate tests like prostate screenings. You'll be encouraged to discuss any questions or concerns along the way. On subsequent visits, doctors will ask about any changes you've noticed since your last visit.

Salt and Your Health

Our contemporary diets simply have too much sodium.

The mineral, prominently found in salt, shows up at high levels in processed food like chips, in certain deli meats and in fast foods. The World Health Organization reports that almost every country now exceeds recommended sodium levels, and in some cases consuming almost double the recommended amount. Unfortunately, persistently high levels of sodium can lead to a range of chronic health conditions, including cardiovascular diseases, elevated blood pressure, strokes, obesity, gastric cancer, osteoporosis and kidney disease, among others.

A CRITICAL GOAL

Simply decreasing our sodium intake is one of the most cost-effective strategies to improve health outcomes. It's critical for maintaining fluid balance, muscle contractions and nerve function but keeping our intake in check is crucial. Sodium plays a crucial role in maintaining the body's water balance but, ironically enough, excessive intake can lead to fluid retention. The result is swelling or edema.

One of the most significant benefits of lowering sodium intake is its positive effect on blood pressure. As too much sodium leads to water retention, the increase in blood volume places additional

strain on the heart. Moderate your intake to reduce the risk of cardiovascular problems. Blood pressure regulation is important since long bouts with an elevated heart rate can increase the risk of strokes. Excessive sodium intake places undue strain on the kidneys, and that can lead

to long-term damage.

HEALTHY STRATEGIES

Create a meal plan that's rich in fresh vegetables, fruits, lean proteins and whole grains. They'll complete a nutritious, balanced diet and they're naturally low in sodium. Items like pretzels, chips, frozen meals

and canned soups tend to be high in sodium. Limiting consumption of these items alone can significantly lower your overall sodium intake.

Be careful with processed and packaged foods, since they frequently have high levels of hidden sodium. Look for products labeled with lower

sodium content – and don't forget to take serving sizes into account. Preparing meals at home puts you in the dietary driver's seat. You control the ingredients and salt levels. Enhance the flavor with spices, herbs and other seasonings, and you'll minimize the need for excess salt.



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Avoiding Health Misinformation

Today's digital landscape offers a wealth of convenient health information. Who hasn't turned to the internet to self-diagnose one symptom or another?

Unfortunately, these searches don't always result in reliable health-related information.

Not all online sources are trustworthy, and this can lead to bad health outcomes, whether you're suffering from a common cold or in need of advanced treatment. Of course, you should never rely solely on the internet instead of a qualified healthcare professional. But even simply learning more about a health condition or its outcome requires an ability to differentiate between misinformation and credible sources.



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INTERNET DANGERS

The amount of health-related content on the internet makes discerning its reliability quite daunting. Some of it may be misleading while other sources share entirely false information. This poses a significant risk to people who are looking to put their symptoms in context, potentially leading to mistaken self-diagnosis, undue anxiety and even inappropriate treatment. Depending on non-verified sources has even

led to the postponement of vital medical care, a potentially deadly mistake. Unfounded claims have never been more rapidly propagated, as conspiracy theories, unproven remedies and utter misdiagnoses from rogue websites are shared to a global audience on social media.

IDENTIFYING SOURCES

Consider the source when determining the reliability of

any health information. Medical professionals and academic institutions are regarded as reliable authorities. Websites associated with hospitals, universities or healthcare providers frequently present articles authored or reviewed by qualified doctors, researchers and specialists. Look for information that references studies published in respected medical publications, such as the

New England Journal of Medicine. Reputable health organizations, peer-reviewed journals and government websites have generally been dependable places to find health information.

EVALUATING INFORMATION

Verify the author's qualifications. Are they a licensed healthcare professional or a recognized expert in their

field? Exercise caution with any website, video or podcast that doesn't provide transparent information about the author or speaker – particularly if they fail to clearly define their qualifications. Be mindful of the tone and language used. Trustworthy sources base their content on facts and evidence rather than sensationalism. Check the dates, too, since science is ever-evolving.

Snacking the Smarter Way

The temptation to snack while living our busy lives can be overwhelming. There's not always time for a balanced meal, much less a home-cooked breakfast or lunch. So, we snack.

With some informed choices and thoughtful planning, it's possible to snack in a nutritious, healthy way. You can alleviate those hunger pangs while sustaining your energy levels throughout the day.

BETTER EATING

Make your own snacks rather than eating whatever is in the local convenience store or vending machine. Focus on creating low-carb, high-protein snacks like turkey roll-ups that help quench your appetite and stabilize blood sugar levels. Layer healthy ingredients like cucumbers, tomatoes and pickles on a slice of lean turkey and then roll it up to create a satisfying wrap.

Other convenient options include fresh fruits like apples and bananas, which can be enjoyed with peanut butter. Fruit or grain bars are reliable options. Just make sure they're made from whole grains, contain minimal added sugars and feature whole-food ingredients.



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GETTING STARTED

When it comes to better snacking, preparation is key: Wash and chop your vegetables and fruits in advance, and then combine them with the next day with add-ons like hummus or nuts to taste. Pre-cut vegetables such as carrots and bell peppers provide essential vitamins and fiber,

and they boast natural ingredients instead of processed sugars and potentially harmful artificial alternatives. For a simple energy-boosting trail mix, combine nuts, seeds, dried fruits and a few pieces of dark chocolate. Single-serving containers of Greek yogurt deliver high levels of protein, calcium and probiotics.

MORE SNACK IDEAS

Create another satisfying snack by pairing nut butter with whole-grain crackers and apple slices, creating a balanced blend of healthy fats and protein. For a fun twist, consider filling celery sticks, cucumber or peppers with hummus for a balanced, crunchy treat. String cheese is

an excellent portable option, with both protein and calcium to bolster on-the-go nutrition. You can try more offbeat snacks such as roasted chickpeas to complete your new smart eating routine. Other nutritious alternatives include roasted watermelon seeds, edamame, cottage cheese, baked tofu, lentil salad and overnight oats.