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WHY BETTER-FOR-YOU SNACKS ARE THE NEW SELF-CARE

Snacking has become more than just a temporary distraction. This mid-afternoon (or sometimes mid-morning) pick-me-up is being elevated to scientifically aid diets, holistically improve health, and conveniently meet new lifestyle habits. But can these mini-meals really satisfy our hunger?

Location [United Kingdom](#)

Featured Experts

Bryony Dash

Bryony Dash is a community manager at Young Foodies, which works with high-growth challenger brands that are serious about bringing their product to market. It helps brands either grow their team internally (recruiting through a vetted pool of FMCG candidates) or connect them to industry experts, such as consultants specialising in commercial strategy, sales, Amazon, marketing/PR, etc.

Mike Hughes

Mike Hughes is the head of research and insight at FMCG Gurus. He has over 14 years of experience analysing consumer trends and is especially interested in challenging industry perceptions around how consumers think and behave, and identifying new and evolving trends. FMCG Gurus provides insights into consumer attitudes and behaviours across the food, beverage, and supplement markets worldwide.

JD Furlong

JD Furlong is the founder of Nooro, the UK's first CBD-infused snack bar, which combines 25mg of CBD with nootropics, Maca, and L-Theanine for increased focus and calm.

Author

[Lisa Harris](#)

Highlights & Data

- The rise of 'mindful snacking' has seen people take a more conscious approach to between-meal breaks, paying more attention to portion sizes and ingredients
- **59%** of people globally prefer to eat lots of small meals throughout the day as opposed to the traditional three ([Mondelēz International, 2019](#))
- Some people are focusing solely on the nutritional benefits of snacks, opting for those that can boost their mood, immune system, or mental concentration
- **64%** of people say that snacks have helped nourish their body, mind, and soul during the COVID-19 pandemic ([Mondelēz International, 2020](#))
- The pandemic has increased the appeal of snack subscription services, which
- **15%** of UK adults have ordered a subscription box since lockdowns began,

mitigate the risk of shopping at stores and can introduce people to new brands

and **36%** describe receiving a parcel as the highlight of their day (*Royal Mail, 2020*)

Scope

MFK Fisher once quipped: “First we eat, then we do everything else.” Though the 20th-century American food writer was primarily interested in gastronomy, she could just as easily have been talking about snacking, which has become more than just an in-between meal distraction for many people. In fact, 66% of UK adults indulge in a snack at least once a day, and 59% of people globally prefer to eat lots of small meals throughout the day as opposed to the traditional three. [1][2]

As snacking frequency has increased, so too has the complexity and depth of the rationale behind it. Food and feeling good are inextricably linked – over half of UK adults want to eat food that ‘makes them feel good now’ – and snacking offers multiple daily opportunities to achieve this. [3] American physician Halbert L. Dunn became known as the ‘father of wellness’ after publishing his book, *High Level Wellness*, in 1961. His concept was picked up by the burgeoning yoga and health movements of the ‘60s and ‘70s, and its ascent since then means the global wellness economy is now valued at \$4.5 trillion. [4] Self-care and wellness are, therefore, increasingly important for snacking brands. Euromonitor predicted that global sales of wellness confectionery would grow at double the rate of traditional confectionery in 2020, for example, and other snacking categories are set to follow suit. [5]

Advertisers have also been motivated to shift snacking to a healthier space. Around £230 million is spent on marketing snacks in the UK, but this has been threatened by imminent advertising restrictions on products high in fat, salt, and sugar. [6] Like a cheeky sex scene, such foods will soon only reveal themselves on TV after the 9pm watershed as the government acts to reduce obesity. [7] By positioning snacks as healthier and concealing them in a veil of self-care, these indulgent products become more palatable. Mike Hughes, the head of research and insight at FMCG Gurus, argues that the rise in self-care snacking is a reaction to poor out-of-home eating habits. “Consumers are increasingly skipping meals, eating on-the-go, and substituting a formal meal with a convenient or indulgent snack,” he explains. “While this may satisfy hunger and improve mood, in the short-term it has also contributed to a significant rise in health problems such as obesity. Consumers have begun re-evaluating their snacking habits and looking for more health-orientated snacks, which has led to a rise in self-care snacks with functional benefits or free-from ingredients.” [8]

Bryony Dash, a community manager at incubator platform *Young Foodies*, warns against self-care at the expense of taste. “Conscious consumers have made self-care snacking popular. More than ever before, we are aware of our individual needs, including our mental wellbeing, our preferences, or food choices,” she says. “However, I don't think self-care snacking will necessarily become mainstream for a while as it doesn't necessarily transcend to ‘great taste’, and great taste is always the priority in snacking.” [9] So, how are brands adapting to new snacking needs? How can they balance the ‘treat’ quality of these mini-meals with expectations for convenience, nutrition, and mindfulness?

Holistic snacking

Rather than absentmindedly gulping down the last biscuit, mindful snacking argues that if you are going to snack, then at least take your time and transform it into a moment of reflection and self-care. Global snack giant Mondeľz International has launched a [Mindful Snacking](#) microsite, complete with step-by-step guides to help people eat mindfully. This is a savvy move, encouraging product sales while circumnavigating the negativity that comes with overconsumption, obesity, and unhealthy eating habits.

We're seeing more mindful snacking portion sizes as well. Oreos and Digestives both have 'Thin' variants, which are essentially the same product but less of it and at a higher price. Likewise, challenger snack brand [Indie Bay](#) sells Pretzel Thins with half the fat and double the protein of standard crisps. 'Thin' might describe the smaller product, but it unequivocally taps into the dieter mindset and encourages consumers to be kind to themselves by eating less. While many people have reported eating more snacks since shifting to remote working due to COVID-19, one upside, according to the 2020 Mondeľz State of Snacking Report, is that 66% say snacking at home has made them more mindful of portion sizes and 64% say that snacks have nourished their body, mind, and soul during these difficult times. [10]

Maintaining a positive attitude and good mental health became even more relevant during the pandemic as people struggled with loneliness and depression. Traditional calming ingredients like chamomile, lemon, and ginger are increasingly being combined in snacks with CBD. For instance, [Nooro's](#) CBD lemon and ginger vegan oat bar claims to boost brain circulation and maintain focus. "Daily life can be hectic," says Nooro founder JD Furlong. "The modern world expects us to outperform yesterday, and so we expect more from our snacks. We've only just begun to see what CBD, adaptogens, and nootropics can do to improve our mood, mind, and body. Nooro's vision is to see more plant-based ingredients and their benefits in the mainstream." [11]

COVID-19 has made people more conscious of how everything affects their health

Rodnae Production (2021) ©

Scientific snacking

In contrast to a holistic approach, scientific snacking dissects midday treats into their most objective, nutritional function. With 44% of Britons seeing snacks as a good way to boost their nutritional intake, many familiar foods are being rebranded as a source of key vitamins or nutrients. For example, **PBFit** markets peanut butter powder as pure, natural protein, and **Sun-Pat** has created a 30% Protein+ version of its mainstream peanut butter. These brands are simply meeting consumer demand, with searches for 'high-protein snacks' rising by 32% between 2018 and 2019. [12] Likewise, **Nairn's** positions its Cheese Snackers mini-oatcakes as a high-fibre, superfood snack, and **Blockhead** chewing gum markets itself as a convenient source of vitamins D, C, B6, and A.

"Cognitive health and mental wellbeing will be important areas of innovation in self-care snacking over the next five years," predicts Hughes. "Consumers are struggling to stay alert and focused, which can impact on quality of life. Instead of traditional energy-boosting products, they will increasingly want foods that help maintain concentration and focus." [8] Snacking as a form of self-medication is one answer as it packages up specific active ingredients to target issues like cognitive health. Yet scientific snacking has created a complicated landscape for consumers to navigate with confusing signposts like micronutrients and nutraceuticals. Additionally, 'healthy' can mean different things to different people: is it healthy to count calories, cut sugar, or get your five-a-day? Such considerations are all-the-more important in the wake of COVID-19, with 45% of UK shoppers saying they've purchased food and drink to boost their immune system as a result of the pandemic. [13]

In this light, ingredients can no longer be fillers – they have to prove their worth on the back-of-pack. Corn- or potato-based products are increasingly being replaced by nutritionally dense alternatives like cassava or chickpea. Likewise, flavours are getting a health-focused overhaul. Black pepper is an active ingredient in Ayurvedic medicine, and so **Bepps** has swapped salt and vinegar for a salt and black pepper puffed black-eyed pea snack to hit both trends. This is a smart move given that two in five UK consumers say they're looking for healthy snacks all or most of the time. [6] Meanwhile, drinks are at an interesting intersection in the context of scientific snacking, with savvy brands marketing themselves as a solution in a bottle. **Luhv Drinks** sells hyper-targeted, functional drinks called Skin, Heart, and Mind, as well as 'Health Shots' boasting names such as Awake, Focus, and Calm. The fridge has subsequently become an apothecary of snacks, complete with products like **Sleep Well** chocolate drink, which contains calcium-rich Jersey milk and a dose of valerian for a better night's sleep.

For avid bio-hackers, snacks offer an ideal way to optimise the body and mind

Polina Tankilevitch (2020) ©

Self-care snacking subscriptions

The pandemic has driven profound structural and behavioural changes, most notably the shift to remote working, which has had a direct impact on how Britons plan and purchase snacks. On-the-go food sales were down 66% in the UK's first national lockdown compared to pre-COVID levels, whereas online shopping has been on the rise since the pandemic hit. [14] Globally, 47% of adults say they've started buying snacks online more often than they do in-store or offline, and most plan to continue this habit once the pandemic is over. [10]

People simply aren't browsing the counter at Pret or picking up a meal deal in Boots anymore. Instead, there has been a boom in subscription, delivery, and planned snack occasions. Subscription services are particularly popular post-COVID as they relieve consumers of shopping admin and can also 'spark joy' as a form of self-care. According to the Royal Mail, 15% of UK adults have ordered a paid subscription box since the first lockdown began, and 36% describe receiving a parcel as the highlight of their day. [15] Dash encourages brands to see subscription as an extension of the in-store experience to ensure retention. "If products are D2C, brands can make the purchasing process more interactive and create the in-store experience at home, including interactivity, convenience, choice," she explains. [9]

Children's snacks are a growing niche in the subscription market as kids get pulled into their parents' self-care bubbles and require near-constant snack supplies while being educated at home. **ChewyMoon** boxes are customisable by age, body type, and activity level, and package snacks as more than a treat. They serve multiple functions: to feed younger children with regular smaller meals, to give older kids a nutritional boost, and expose picky eaters to new flavours. Subscriptions become more like prescriptions when they arrive on the doorstep regularly, and snacking becomes as indispensable to family households as Calpol.

Subscription services may replace lunchboxes while kids are stuck at home

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Insights and opportunities

Make sustainability part of the self-care message

With holistic snacking on the rise, people are focusing on the planet's health as well as their own. Healthy snacks with sustainable messaging carry implicit better-for-you connotations and are useful indicators of quality. Dash confirms that ethical sourcing should be a core consideration for any new snack brand, saying: "Consumers want to know where products come from, where and how they are sourced." However, the transparency and sustainability agenda only works end-to-end. "If brands think about packaging and sustainability, they also need to think about the type of consumer they are appealing to and relevant comms. Will the consumer find time to provide the right conditions for packaging to biodegrade, for example? Do they have the right recycling resources at home?" [9] Future-facing snack brands must ensure their sustainability message is robust and transparent on all levels.

Clarity and purpose

Scientific terminology sounds trustworthy, but an excess of jargon in the snacking sector can cause confusion and result in a fragmented marketplace. Clear messaging with concrete, evidence-based health claims is the best approach. People want to be shown how to mix and match snacks with meals to create a balanced, personalised daily intake of essential vitamins and nutrients. [Willy's Apple Cider Vinegar](#) recommends a daily dose of 25ml ACV as part of a balanced diet, for example. It markets a convenient 25ml shot for time-poor consumers, or larger bottles to mix into smoothies and snacks. Brands that recognise how people want to take charge of their health and put powerful products into consumers' hands to achieve this will be best placed for success.

Subscribing to the essentials

Subscription brands can serve snackified, premium versions of everyday essentials like milk, bread,

coffee, and treats. For instance, **The Biscuit Baron** delivers surprise selection boxes of international biscuits to its subscribers, including treats from Japan, Greece, and Italy, all of which help to make home tea breaks more interesting. Snacks are perfectly placed at the intersection of four wider consumer trends for reducing portion sizes, permissive indulgence, convenience, and premiumisation. By reinventing commodities as ultra-convenient snacks, brands can ensure they become an indispensable part of eating habits.

Sources

1. **Mintel** (May 2019)
2. **MondÄ“lez International**(2019)
3. **Mintel** (May 2020)
4. **Global Wellness Summit** (January 2020)
5. **The Grocer** (January 2020)
6. **Mintel** (July 2020)
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8. Interview with Mike Hughes conducted by the author
9. Interview with Bryony Dash conducted by the author
10. **MondÄ“lez International**(November 2020)
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12. **The Grocer** (September 2019)
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