Making the Healthy Choice with Packaged Foods

Have you ever heard that all packaged foods are bad? Packaged foods often get a bad rep for being high in calories, sugars, and fat. While this may be true for some packaged foods, other options can easily fit into a healthy, well balanced diet.

With the busy schedule of a college student, quick and easy snack foods can help maintain a healthy diet and weight. It is important as a student to fuel your body and brain for the school day. Here are some general tips that will help you make the healthy choice when considering packaged foods!

- Trail Mix: Look for options that include whole-grain, high fiber cereal, nuts such as almonds or walnuts and dried fruit.
- Granola Bars: Select bars with at least 3 grams of fiber per serving.
- Pretzels: Look for those that contain at least 3 grams of fiber per serving.
- Peanuts: Identify an option that has no salt added.
- Chips: Choose options that are baked for a lower fat content with 2 or less grams of saturated fat.
- Fruit: Look for canned fruit in 100% fruit juice to get zero added sugar.
- Frozen vegetables: Select items that do not have an added sauce to reduce calories and fat.
- Yogurt: Choose a low-fat option with added Vitamin D.
- Nut Butters: Choose an almond or peanut butter to enjoy with sliced fruit or whole grain crackers.
- Bagged Popcorn: Look for options that have minimal ingredients such as popcorn, oil, and salt. This is a great choice for a whole grain snack!

References:
Blake, J. The Top 5 Healthy Processed Foods That You Should Be Eating. Boston.com http://archive.boston.com/lifestyle/health/blog/nutrition/2014/03/the_top_5_healthy_processed_foods
There are signs on packaging that can help distinguish healthy options.

**Added Sugars:** These include any sugars added that are not naturally in the foods, such as sodas. Look at the ingredient list to see if there are added sugars in the product. If sugar, maltose, brown sugar, corn syrup, cane sugar, honey, or fruit juice concentrate is included in the first 2-3 ingredients, there may be a better options out there!

**Sodium:** Choose foods with “no added salt”, “low- sodium”, or “reduced- sodium” to make sure you are limiting the salt you get from packaged foods.

**Fat:** Watch out for foods with trans- fats! Trans-fats can raise bad cholesterol and lower good cholesterol. Look for foods with zero grams of Trans fat on the nutrition label. One way to avoid trans-fat is choosing foods without partially hydrogenated oils on the ingredient list.

References:


Blake, J. *The Top 5 Healthy Processed Foods That You Should Be Eating.* Boston.com [http://archive.boston.com/lifestyle/health/blog/nutrition/2014/03/the_top_5_healthy_processed_foods.html](http://archive.boston.com/lifestyle/health/blog/nutrition/2014/03/the_top_5_healthy_processed_foods.html)
