

## surviving daily life

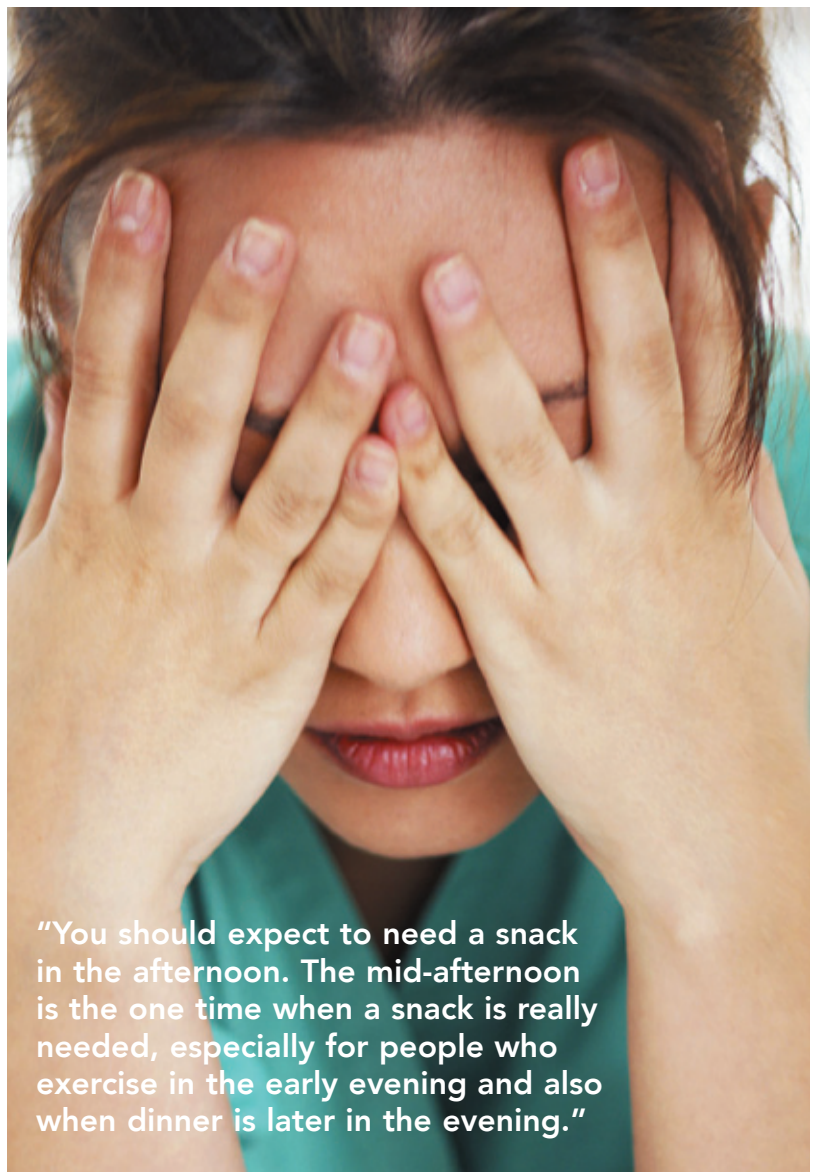
# How to.... beat the 3pm

**Jeni Pearce**, dietitian, with tips on keeping away from the temptations of the afternoon snack box.

**DO YOU FIND** the late afternoon is the time you feel tired, have poor concentration and feel low in energy? Do you get the urge to dive into the office snack box or vending machine, where that chocolate bar is waiting to pep you up?

### **Why does this happen?**

Is it just no willpower, or is it physiological? Actually, it could be to do with your food choices and meal patterns earlier in the day. The "3pm slump" is thought to be caused by a small drop in blood glucose levels. This often follows a lunch with insufficient fuel, or one that is made up mostly of high glycemic foods. These foods are absorbed quickly and cause a rapid rise and then corresponding fall in blood glucose levels. (see our feature on GI for more on this, page 24). Protein foods, fruit and whole grains are more slowly absorbed providing a more sustained release of energy, so tend not to produce the same response.



**"You should expect to need a snack in the afternoon. The mid-afternoon is the one time when a snack is really needed, especially for people who exercise in the early evening and also when dinner is later in the evening."**

# slump!

## Breakfast

Studies on breakfast clearly show that breakfast-skippers overeat and make poorer choices in the afternoon. The strategy to prevent the slump starts with eating a good breakfast. A small breakfast doesn't provide sufficient fuel for the day's activities and your energy stores are used up long before the end of the day. Trying to survive the entire day on very little food will leave you famished in the afternoon, with poor concentration and tolerance.

The next step is to eat a well-balanced lunch (containing wholegrain breads, fresh fruit, and lean meats, legumes, dairy foods and yoghurts). A few rice crackers and a cup of soup will just not provide the long-term energy needed to get you through the afternoon.

## Snacking

Finally, you should expect to need a snack in the afternoon. The mid-afternoon is the one time when a snack is really needed, especially for people who exercise in the early evening and also when dinner is later in the evening. You'll need a snack to boost brain power and activity around 3 hours after lunch. So don't deny yourself next time you feel hungry in the

mid-afternoon. Check the clock; you could be entirely entitled to a snack. Examine the composition of your breakfast and lunch: did you eat enough? Have you missed a food group completely? Remember, a low blood glucose level may make making a healthier choice more difficult and that chocolate bar harder to resist. You'll need more willpower to make a good snacking decision.

A great idea is to plan your snacks rather than leaving them to the last minute. Then you won't have to resort to whatever's left in the snack box.

HFG



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## Healthy snack choices:

### SWEET

- Fresh fruit – use seasonal varieties
- Fruit salad – fresh or canned
- Dried fruit – raisins, apple, apricots
- Fruit and nut mix - ¼ cup
- Yoghurt
- Low-fat smoothies
- Fruit smoothies
- Boxed smoothies – 'Up and Go', 'fastbreak'
- Flavoured milk, 'sculpt'
- Wholegrain crackers with salmon or tuna
- Rice cakes with hummus, cottage cheese, tuna or salmon
- Small uncoated wholegrain muesli bars
- Hot soups with a few noodles or rice
- Half a packet of instant noodles with added vegetables

### SAVOURY

- Plain popcorn – 1 cup plain
- Pretzels – ¼ cup
- Carrot sticks with hummus
- Celery slices with hummus
- Wholegrain crackers with hummus
- Wholegrain crackers with cottage cheese
- Salad sandwiches
- Small to medium size muffins – fruit and vegetable based
- Muffin splits with cottage cheese, hummus, or salsa and grated cheese
- Serving of breakfast cereal and low-fat milk
- Low-fat dip and crackers