

## Defining the Snack

Snacking, especially beverage consumption outside of a regular meal, continues to increase among Americans, accounting for more than 25% of calorie intake each day, according to research presented at the 2011 Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) Annual Meeting & Food Expo.

Between 1977-2006, snacking in the American diet has grown to constitute “a full eating event,” or a fourth meal, averaging about 580 calories each day, said Richard D. Mattes, Ph.D., professor of foods and nutrition at Purdue University.

While snacking has increased in general, “there has been a significant increase in the amount of calories consumed through beverages,” said Mattes. Beverages now account for 50% of the calories consumed through snacking. As many Americans do not equate beverages as readily with calorie intake, they are less likely to offset or take into account these calories, said Mattes.

In general, however, snacking is not linked with weight gain, according to G. Harvey Anderson, Ph.D., Department of Nutritional Sciences at the University of Toronto. “The literature does not support the intuitive notion that increased consumption of snack foods is an independent cause of obesity,” said Anderson. In fact, for some age groups—young children

### Time to Snack

#### Amount of Time Spent Consuming Food and/or Beverages (in Minutes)

	2008	2006
Primary meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner)	70	70
Secondary eating	30	15
Secondary drinking	85	45

Source: Purdue University

and older adults, for example, “foods consumed outside a meal are important sources of nutrients, as well as energy.”

To further assess the impact of snacking on Americans’ diet and health, a definitive definition of what constitutes a snack, as well as more information on what motivates individuals to snack, is desperately needed, said Nancy Auestad, Ph.D., of the Dairy Research Institute.

Nearly 100% of Americans in all age groups eat a snack each day, yet no standard definition exists on what constitutes a snack or what motivates individuals to snack, said Auestad. Without a clear definition, consumers are “self-defining” snacks and snacking, “and the lines between snacks and meals are blurred.” 