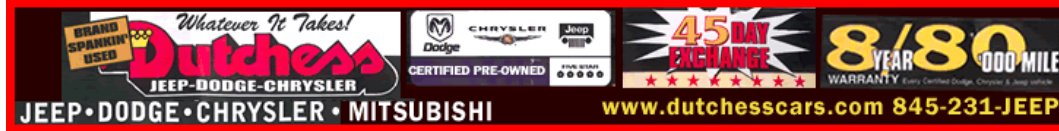




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Airlines help travelers go light

By CHARLES STUART PLATKIN

It's been almost six years since I did an airline food investigation, and much has changed. No longer are airlines serving those high-calorie, tasteless meals with up to 1,500 calories. Now they serve prepackaged snacks and sandwiches, and some even offer healthy selections. Here are the offerings and ratings (Health Score: 5 stars = highest rate, 1 star = lowest rating):

United Airlines

Cooperation in providing nutritional information: Very helpful.

Health score: (*****) United has the most variety and the most healthful choices. The Smartpack is trans-fat free and "vegetarian-friendly."

Best bet: Go for the Ritebite or the Smartpack (if sharing).

Total calories: 895 (Smartpack), 550 (Minimeal), 650 (Quickpick), 580 (Ritebite).

Exercise equivalents: (Amount of walking to burn off the calories) 231 minutes (Smartpack); 142 minutes (Minimeal); 168 minutes (Quickpick); 149 minutes (Ritebite).

Cost: \$5 per box.

Snack choices include:

Smartpack

- SunGold Creamy SunButter (1.5 ounces, 266 calories).
- Bear Naked All-Natural Fruit and Nut Granola (1/2 cup, 280 calories).
- Vermont Village Cannery Organic Peach Applesauce (4 ounces, 80 calories).
- Pita Shack Multigrain & Honey Lavash crackers (0.9 ounces, 120 calories).

Minimeal

- Hormel hard salami slices (1 ounce, 110 calories).
- Rondele Peppercorn Parmesan cheese spread (1 ounce, 70 calories).
- Venus wheat crackers (1 package, 60 calories).
- Kettle Classics natural potato chips (1 ounce, 150 calories).

Quickpick

- Jack Link's hickory-smoked beef jerky (1 ounce, 60 calories)
- Stoned Classics all-natural blue tortilla chips (1x ounces, 180 calories).
- La Victoria Thick n' Chunky salsa (1x ounces, 15 calories).

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Bring your own snacks

Water: Buy it after the security checkpoint to take onboard. Dehydration can cause or exacerbate hunger, jet lag and fatigue.

Cereal: Kashi (a variety of healthy versions) or Cheerios are both portable, low-calorie choices.

Fruit: Apples, pears and grapes are durable, and almost any fruit can be stored in a container.

Rice cakes: Be selective, since calorie and fat content vary widely.

Energy bars: Although they tend to be high in calories and fat, they often are better than a slice of pizza or a candy bar.

Nonfat yogurt: Yogurt is a great portable snack (although it is perishable). You can pack a 3-ounce container or less in an insulated bag or take a small cooler, but understand that this can be counted against carry-on bag limitations.

Sandwiches: Pre-cut them into portion-controlled sections so you can pull them out at different times during the trip without making a mess. Chicken, turkey, cold cuts and cheese (on 100 percent whole-wheat bread) are great options for sandwiches.

Soy chips: A portable, low-cal, high-fiber snack.

Make sure to check with the Transportation Security Administration for the latest in-flight rules: www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtml#10

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- Pepperidge Farm Milano cookies (2 cookies, 120 calories).

Ritebite

- Bumblebee Sensations Lemon & Pepper Seasoned Tuna Medley (3 ounces, 110 calories).
- Late July Organic Crackers (1 package, 100 calories).
- Wild Garden Hummus (1 jar, 73.5 calories).
- Stacy's Multigrain Baked Pita Chips (1 ounce, 130 calories).



Continental Airlines

Cooperation in providing nutritional information: Very helpful.

Health score: (****) Not much variety, but low-calorie, high-impact meals.

Best bet: Both sandwiches are fine; the light mayo is a nice touch.

Total calories: 285 (turkey), 316 (ham).

Exercise equivalents: (Amount of walking to burn off the calories) 73 minutes (turkey); 81 minutes (ham); 21 minutes (peanuts); 13 minutes (pretzels).

Cost: No charge.

Snack choices for flights over two hours:

- Turkey sandwich (170 calories, including packet of Hellmann's light mayo).
- Ham sandwich (201 calories, including packet of French's yellow mustard).
- Carrots (35 calories).
- Fun-size candy bar (80 calories).

Snack choices for flights under two hours:

- Honey-roasted peanuts (1.5 ounces, 80 calories).
- Mini pretzels (1.5 ounces, 50 calories).

JetBlue

Cooperation in providing nutritional information: Very helpful.

Health score: (****) The individually packaged snacks are portion-controlled and trans-fat free.

Best bet: The nuts have protein and good fat and will satisfy you.

Total calories: See individual choices below.

Exercise equivalents: (Amount of walking to burn off the calories) see individual choices below.

Cost: No charge.

Snack choices include:

(not a snack pack, distributed separately, no charge).

- Nabisco 100 Calorie Packs Wheat Thins Minis (1 package, 100 calories, 26 minutes of walking).
- Chocobillys Chocolate Chunk (4 cookies, 130 calories, 34 minutes of walking).
- Terra Blues Potato Chips (1-ounce bag, 140 calories, 36 minutes of walking).

American Airlines

Cooperation in providing nutritional information: Helpful.

Health score: (***) The meat, nuts, raisins and cheese in the snack pack have enough protein and fat to satisfy you.

Best bet: Skip the breakfast muffin unless you have nothing else (but split it with your seatmate). If you buy the snack pack, get rid of the cookies and the Goldfish.

Total calories: 710 (snack pack) 440/420 (breakfast muffin)

Exercise equivalents: (Amount of walking to burn off the calories) 183 minutes (snack pack), 108 minutes (blueberry muffin); 113 minutes (chocolate muffin).

Cost:\$4, snack box; \$2, muffin

Snack choices include:

- Pepperidge Farm Goldfish (0.75 ounces 100 calories).
- Lorna Doone Cookies (2 cookies 140 calories).
- Kings Raisins (28 grams, 90 calories).

US Airways

Cooperation in providing information:Not helpful.

Health score: (**) Not much variety and not much in terms of nutritional value. The snack pack is offered on flights of 2.5 hours or more.

Best bet: Eat the fruit and nut mix and the cheese; skip the crackers and cookies.



Total calories: 470 (snack pack)

Exercise equivalents: (Amount of walking to burn off the calories) 121 minutes.

Cost: \$3 per snack pack.

Snack choices:

- Azar Fruit and Nut Mix (1 ounce, 110 calories).
- Famous Amos Chocolate Chip Cookies (4 cookies, 150 calories).
- Austin Cheese Crackers with Cheddar Cheese (1.38 ounces, 210 calories).

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