

# The Washington Times

## 100 Calorie snacks

April 21, 2008

By Karen Goldberg Goff –

For many dieters, the key is knowing when to stop. If you don't have that self-control, however, food manufacturers are glad to help.

That's why 100-calorie portions have become a lucrative and fast-growing segment of the market. Consumers are scarfing down 100-calorie cans of Coke, 100-calorie English muffins and 100-calorie packages of M&Ms, Wheat Thins and Nutter Butters, among others, to the tune of \$200 million a year.

Hey, it's a start toward counting calories for those without an internal calculator.

"People are looking for strategies, and 100 is a nice, even number," says Lisa Katic, a registered dietitian and nutrition consultant based in Arlington. Ms. Katic works with the Arlington-based Snack Food Association, a trade group.

"They still get to have what they want with a 100-calorie pack," she says. "I mean, who is going to count out 16 chips and say 'This is a serving'?"

**Actually, counting out 16 chips might be cheaper, as well as more educational, says Lisa Young, a New York nutritionist and author of the book "The Portion Teller Plan," which teaches how to recognize exactly what a portion is and how it relates to weight loss.**

"The good news is that the packages are only 100 calories," she says. "Knowing this, you are less likely to eat five. The bad news is that most of the 100-calorie packages are not healthy: Oreos, chips, Cheetos. I guess 100 calories of junk is better than 400 calories, but it is still junk food."

**Ms. Young also says that purchasing a package of 100-calorie pouches is about one-third more expensive than buying a box of cookies, for example, which would provide more servings.**

A 6.6-ounce bag of Pepperidge Farm Goldfish crackers at an area Target store is \$1.79. A box of five 100-calorie pouches of Goldfish crackers, at a total net weight of about 3.75 ounces, costs \$2.79. (A 100-calorie pack of Goldfish weighs about 0.75 ounces, depending on the flavor.)

**"100-calorie packs are very nicely marketed," Ms. Young says. "People think they are doing something about their weight. Of course, this isn't a new concept. It is basic portion control, and that advice has been around forever. But that is boring advice because no one wants to work to lose weight."**

The Hartman Group, a food research organization, did a survey last year that found 29 percent of Americans believe 100-calorie packs are worth the extra cost. Other respondents, however, said they prefer the convenience of single-serving packages without the 100-calorie designation because of the diet stigma and because the 100-calorie packs often taste funny.

Indeed, many 100-calorie packs don't contain the same products consumers know and appreciate in their familiar form. For instance, Oreos in the 100-calorie pack translate into Oreo Thin Crisps — chocolate cookie crisps without the cream filling.

Kind of defeats the purpose of an Oreo, no? Like Jack Nicholson's famous order of a chicken salad sandwich on wheat toast in "Five Easy Pieces": "Now all you have to do is hold the chicken and bring me the toast."

Nevertheless, Laurie Guzzinati, spokeswoman for Nabisco, which is owned by Kraft Foods, insists that consumer research shows that people want the experience of eating their old favorites. They also want quantity, she says.

"They could eat two Oreos for 100 calories," Ms. Guzzinati says. "Or they can eat 20 Oreo Thin Crisps. It is not exactly that Oreo wafer-and-cream experience, but it is an Oreo experience."

Consumers also said more pieces take longer to eat, making them feel as if they get a lot for their 100 calories.

"They will get a satisfying snack with a higher piece count," she says. "The number of pieces they were getting is a key fact."

Nabisco was a front-runner in the 100-calorie pack market, introducing the concept in 2004. Within a year, the company sold \$100 million of the products. Since then, virtually every snack food marketer has jumped in.

**Still, training the eye to know what a portion is will be more helpful in the end, Ms. Young says.**

**"If it is snack food, take just a handful," she says. "You can get a measuring cup. You can know that a fist is the size of a cup. You can buy a big bag and make your own packages with sandwich bags. You don't have to do this forever. Once you see what a portion size is, you will train yourself."**