

Are Protein/Bliss Balls Actually a Healthy Snack?

The world we live in today is constantly promoting “healthy snacks”. “dessert alternatives”, “low carb options”, etc. This has come about by our general increase in awareness of health foods. Protein balls and bliss balls are just one example. Protein balls are often advertised as low carb, high protein snacks perfect for before or after the gym. And bliss balls are often seen as your healthy snack alternative to say chocolate when you have that sweet craving you are trying to kill when 3pm hits. But are these little balls of goodness actually the perfect snack? Are they healthy? And should they be included in your diet?

There is no short answer to these questions. Because the answer can be yes AND no. It depends on a lot of factors so let's look into some of them.

First... homemade vs store bought. You know what is going in to homemade balls so always opt to make your own. Store bought are often filled with random little ingredients that do not need to be there and turn a perfectly good snack into a hidden sugar, high fat, preservative filled, not so healthy snack.

Next, choice of ingredients. Most balls are made with seeds, nuts and dried fruit. Combined with some other tasty ingredients like cacao powder, shredded coconut or protein powder.

The great thing about these ingredients, they are delicious and nutritious raw foods. The downfall, they are all quite calorie dense. Nuts and seeds need to be portion controlled because of their high fat content. Healthy fats yes, but fats none the less, which increases calories. Dried fruit we know is full of sugar. Again, natural sugars, but still sugar. Which once again adds to the calorie content.

That brings us to... portion size. Think if you have a heap of nuts, seeds and dried fruit packed into one little ball, that is going to be a calorie powerhouse. Having too many balls filled with high calorie ingredients can really throw out your calorie intake for the day. Does it mean you shouldn't have them... no. It means you need to be aware of your portions and the ingredients you choose to put into them. The biggest problem with these balls is that people tend to eat more than the recommended serving size. Because of their calorie density, you will only be eating 1 or 2 balls. This is not a lot of food for most people, and they desire more. Store bought balls often have several portions in one packet and not many people stop at the recommended serving size. This is when it can become a problem.

So... The pros – provide a good dose of healthy fats and fibre from the nut, seeds and fruit base from which most are made. Adds protein to the diet which can help keep you fuller for longer. They are made with real ingredients, not highly processed. And they can curb your sweet tooth and steer you away from the cookie jar at work.

The cons – portion sizes are small. If you are the type of person to eat 1 ball and think ‘that wasn't enough, I need more food than that’, well bliss balls probably are not the thing for you. Too often are they over consumed because of their small portion sizes. They will remain a fairly sugary snack. Yes natural sugar from fruit, but still sugar. Better than a chocolate bar but just as damaging to the daily sugar intake if you aren't careful. If making them at home, be aware of how much sweetness you are putting into them. You want them to taste nice but opt for 1-2 sweet ingredients only.

So should they be a staple in your diet. I would say occasionally. Do not rely on them for every craving you ever get. But making a batch and having them over the course of the week is fine. Just like everything, even those classified as healthy, all things in moderation.