



# Light Side

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## October is National Popcorn Poppin' Month

Americans consume some 16 billion quarts of this whole grain, good-for-you snack each year. That equals approximately one quart per person per week!! The alluring aroma and taste help make popcorn a popular treat and today it is lauded for its nutrient and economic value as well.

Popcorn does have a history all its own, too. Some interesting historical facts about popcorn include:

- Popcorn was very popular from the 1890s until the Great Depression. Street vendors used to follow crowds around, pushing steam or gas-powered poppers through fairs, parks and expositions.
- Also, during the Depression, popcorn at 5 or 10 cents a bag was one of the few luxuries down-and-out families could afford. While other businesses failed, the popcorn business thrived.
- During WW II, sugar was sent overseas for U.S. troops, which meant there wasn't much sugar left in the States to make candy. Thanks to this unusual situation, Americans ate three times as much popcorn as usual.
- Popcorn went into a slump during the early 1950s when television became popular. Attendance at movie theaters declined and, with it, popcorn consumption.
- Microwave popcorn – the very first use of microwave heating in the 1940s – accounted for about \$240 million in annual U.S. popcorn sales in the 1990s.
- Most U.S. popcorn is grown in the Midwest, primarily in Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio and Kentucky.



Because of its nutritional benefits, there is no doubt that popcorn can be a perfectly sensible snack to fit into a meal/fitness plan:

- Air-popped popcorn has about 30 calories per cup; oil-popped has only about 55 calories per cup.
- When lightly buttered, popcorn contains about 135 calories per cup.
- Popcorn is a whole grain, making it a “good-for-you” food.
- Popcorn contains fiber, providing roughage the body needs in the daily diet.
- Popcorn, by itself, is naturally low in sodium, fat and calories.
- Popcorn has no artificial additives or preservatives, and it is sugar-free.
- Popcorn is ideal for between-meal

snacking since it satisfies, but doesn't seem to spoil the appetite.

- 3 cups of popped popcorn equal one serving from the grain group or one carbohydrate choice (15 grams carbohydrate).

### Popping tips – Storage

Without moisture (13.5-14 percent per kernel is needed), popcorn can't pop. That's why it is important to store popcorn correctly. An entire percentage of moisture can be lost on a hot day if kernels are left uncovered. That may not sound like a lot, but it does add up. So, how do you store popcorn? Airtight containers – plastic or glass – are your best bet to avoid moisture loss, especially when stored in a cool place like a cupboard. Avoid the refrigerator, as many refrigerators contain little moisture and may actually dry out the popcorn kernels.

*This month's On the Light Side is written by registered dietitian Nancy Schive*



## Popcorn in a brown paper bag

In a small bowl, mix together:

- 1/2 tsp oil (optional)
- 1/4 tsp salt (optional)

**Instructions:** Stir in 1/4 cup popcorn kernels (any kind will do, but fresh will pop better). Stir with a spoon until everything is well mixed.

Pour into a brown paper bag. Fold the bag over two to three times, and place upright in the microwave. Microwave until popping slows down to a couple pops per second. Everyone's microwave is different and will require a different amount of time. Start at 1-1/2 minutes and add time as needed. Only use the paper bag once.

As noted above, this can be done without added fat or salt.

## Parmesan 'n' Pretzel Crowd Pleaser Popcorn

**Makes (6) 2-cup servings**

A savory popcorn snack mix that won't leave you feeling like you need to hit the gym afterwards.

- 12 c. popped popcorn, air-popped
- 2 c. fat-free mini pretzels
- 4 tsp. dried chives
- 1 tbsp. grated parmesan cheese
- 1 tsp. dry ground mustard
- 1/4 tsp. salt-free seasoning blend
- Optional butter-flavored non-stick cooking spray

**Instructions:** Place popped popcorn in a large bowl, removing any unpopped kernels. Add pretzels; toss to combine. In a small bowl, combine chives, parmesan, ground mustard and seasoning blend; mix well. Spray popcorn mixture for 5 seconds with non-stick cooking spray; sprinkle with 1/4 of the seasoning mixture. Toss. Repeat spraying with cooking spray and sprinkling with the seasoning mixture 3 more times, tossing well after each addition and ending with the seasoning mixture. Best served within 24 hours of preparation. Store in a tightly covered container.

**Nutrition facts per serving:** 117 calories; 2 g fat; 138 mg sodium; 21 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber.

### Other flavor combinations for topping

- turmeric and coriander
- cayenne and smoked paprika
- brown sugar and orange zest
- chili powder and lime
- parmesan and oregano
- parmesan and black pepper

